Reformulating the Doctrine of Original Sin: Sin as Relational Breach, Original Trauma as Efficient Cause, and a Soteriology of Attachment to God

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I hereby attest that all work contained herein is representative of original work and that all material drawn from other sources is appropriately cited.

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To the Church—to those leading, following, learning, unlearning, believing, doubting, healing, bleeding, receiving, resisting, transforming, struggling, or suffering—and for its head, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God with us.

Abstract

The Western Christian doctrine of original sin posits humanity possesses an inherited and inherent sinful nature that renders humans unable to do anything but sin, which was a theory constructed to explain the presence of sin and evil. The concept of original sin is founded upon an interpretation of Genesis 3, wherein the first humans disobeyed a command of God and in the act of doing so their inherently good nature became immediately and irrevocably corrupted, which was the resultant sinful nature passed onto their progeny, i.e., humanity. However, the doctrine delivers a pessimistic anthropology, e.g., stating humans are inherently evil or wicked, to which Reformed theology adds, humans *are* sin. This is an inherent problem with the doctrine as when such views of self and others are believed it engenders negative cognitions, e.g., hatred or disgust of self or others, that influence how we think and act, and around which we develop identities and worldviews. Thus, the doctrine is potentially harmful to humanity and can perpetuate sin in the world, rather than facilitating healing and transformation that brings about restoration that causes sin to abate. This assessment calls for a reformulation of the doctrine, which is the central task of this dissertation.

Offered herein is a reinterpretation of Genesis 2-3 as read through the lenses of relationality and trauma that proffers an "original" trauma as efficient cause of sin, and that the traumatic retention of which is what has been passed down transgenerationally for millennia, thus appearing as a sinful nature. The embodiment of trauma can and often does engender thinking and behaviors that are sinful, however the underlying physiological and neuropsychological states that produce such can be addressed, resolved, and healed, which serves to halt cycles of trauma and, by extension, sin. Current trauma studies and attachment theory will be employed to substantiate the argument for this proposal of trauma as an efficient

cause of sin, as well as inform solutions to the problem and effects of sin that bring healing, transformation, and the restoration of all things.

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Acknowledgements

The African concept of *ubuntu* means "I am because we are," and this dissertation not only has that as a central theme, but it also flowed from it. This dissertation is an extension of me and is therefore an extension of those who have helped shape and form me across the span of my life. There are obvious groups of people to acknowledge for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this long and arduous doctoral journey: my dissertation committee and doctoral cohort, as well as my family and friends (and particularly those who prayed me through some of the harder moments). But then there are the not so obvious groups of people to acknowledge who nonetheless played important roles in the formation of this dissertation (and me): those who journeyed alongside me in the wilderness for any length of time, those who have shared with me their own joys, pains, and perspectives on life, those who sharpened me through conflict or counsel, and those with whom I may have had only one key conversation. Overall, it is the larger process of being and becoming and all the innumerable people therein that is to be acknowledged, for without it—and them—I would not be, and this dissertation would not be. For whatever role you played—large or small, painful or joyous, short-lived or enduring—thank you.

Introduction to the Problem

Just as Helen of Troy was the face that launched a thousand ships, there was a statement that launched a thousand thoughts in me, culminating in this dissertation: "Never underestimate the power of the sinful nature." Such was a piece of parenting advice given to a new mother when her baby was only a few months old. Hearing this statement first-hand struck me dumb in the moment, but not because it was foreign to me. I have heard similar statements quite regularly among Christian parents since the mid-1990s, which is when I had arrived at an age where my friends were becoming parents and, therefore, parenting books could be found on many a coffee table. Aside from the (still) popular secular books, *What to Expect* series by Heidi Murkoff and *On Becoming Baby Wise,* by Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam, MD, one could also find the (still) popular Christian titles, *To Train Up a Child* by Michael and Debi Pearl, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp, and *Growing Kids God's Way (GKGW)* by Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo, which "was the first major parenting course written for the Christian community, and has since served over two million households" (GrowingFamilies.Life, n.d.).[1] Given the popularity and reach of these Christian offerings, even if someone did not read the books or attend a *GKGW* class (such as myself), chances are good their tenets and methods got passed along and thus assimilated into an entire generation of Christians (of which I was a part), and a foundational tenet among them all is the inherent sin nature of a child (Ezzo & Ezzo, 1998; Pearl & Pearl, 2015; Tripp, 2005). The consequent parenting methods put forth in the texts are intended to help restrain that nature (and, therefore, sin) through various methods of behavioral training and

[1] All materials remain popular. A Google search of "Growing Kids God's Way registration" revealed old and new links to online registrations at churches over the last several years, including 2022. *To Train Up a Child* was first published in 1994, and through 2014 it sold 1.2 million copies in 12 languages (Pearl & Pearl, 2015). *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (first published in 1995) has also likely sold millions in multiple languages, and as of this writing (April 14, 2022) its Kindle edition is ranked #4 in Amazon's best sellers in Child Care (by comparison *On Becoming Baby Wise* is ranked 15th). Amazon's best sellers are updated hourly.

discipline, while simultaneously working to produce readily obedient and/or morally responsible children who will, hopefully, grow up to love and serve the Lord as a result (Ezzo & Ezzo, 1998; Pearl & Pearl, 2015; Tripp, 2005). It is unknown whether these authors intended the sin nature to become such a point of emphasis (recall the advice given to the new mother above), but it was a natural outcome given the central focus on sin and the sin nature *in general* within Christianity—or at least in much of the Christianity found in the United States, which is the context from which I write and experience life as a follower of Jesus.

The Western Preoccupation with Sin

My experience has been quite ecumenical and not limited to a specific tradition, denomination, or geography. I grew up in the Midwest and was catechized in the Roman Catholic Church (with charismatic influence), and then transitioned to Protestantism during college in New England where I began attending an Evangelical Free Church. After college I moved to the Deep South and then, several years later, to the intermountain West, during which I have regularly attended, served, planted, and/or worked within Southern Baptist, Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Foursquare churches, but I also got a good taste of Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal/Charismatic, and various non-denominational churches along the way. All that to say, the belief that humans are naturally sinful, i.e., inclined to do bad, perverse, wicked, or evil things from birth, is common among them all, and thus, common within Western Christianity, in which all those various church affiliations (and many more) find their roots. With that, if you were to ask a random person in the U.S. who claims to be a Christian, "why do people sin?"—without even qualifying what sin is—there is a good chance the response will be an immediate and patent: "because we have a sinful nature." It is a concept learned early and repeated often; therefore, it is deeply embedded in Western Christianity and carries with it a

sense of absolute truth that goes largely unquestioned because all one needs to do is look around, and within, to prove that is the case. Consider the following statement: “All you have to do is watch a toddler pitching a fit in the store because he isn't getting his way to prove we are born with a sinful nature.” That is not a far stretch of the imagination because 1) it is likely we have seen such behavior at some point in our lives and rendered some form of judgment, and 2) those were my own words, some variation of which I used to utter when teaching about sin and “the Fall” of humanity. I did not come up with that *ex nihilo,* but rather it was a teaching handed down to me (and probably with the same verbiage) that I was then passing along to others because it is the dominant narrative about human nature in Western Christianity. It is easily substantiated by observation and experience, but also, and more importantly, undergirded by the doctrine of original sin, which provides a simple, straightforward, and seemingly irrefutable explanation for the sin we experience within our individual selves and collectively in the world. Well-known Reformed theologian and pastor, the late Dr. R. C. Sproul (2015), explained it as follows:

> The doctrine of original sin teaches that people sin because we are sinners. It's not that we are sinners because we sin, but rather, we sin because we are sinners; that is, since the fall of man, we have inherited a corrupted condition of sinfulness. We now have a sin nature. The New Testament says we are under sin; we have a disposition toward wickedness, so that we all do, in fact, commit sins because it is our nature to commit sins. But that's not the nature that was originally given to us by God. We were originally innocent, but now the race has been plummeted into a state of corruption. (para. 3)

While much is lacking in Sproul's (2015) explanation, such as the historical development of the doctrine, how and when it became accepted church doctrine, an explanation of how human

nature became corrupted and heritable, or, notably, providing any specific scriptural evidence and exegesis for consideration, it is a good representation of how the doctrine of original sin is received, understood, and perpetuated in Western Christianity by people in the pulpits and pews. In sum, we sin because we are sinners from birth. It is simple, it makes sense, goes largely unchallenged, and carries great explanatory power for many believers.

It would be prudent to briefly note why I am making specific reference to *Western* Christianity, which includes Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. This is because the doctrine of original sin, and specifically its central concept of original sin (Lat. *peccatum originale* or *originale peccatum*), is "a *theory* about *inherited* sin that is *Western"* (Shults, 2003, p. 192), i.e., descending from Rome and Latin church fathers (most notably Augustine of Hippo), and as such it is not held by other religions or Christian traditions.[2] For example, neither Eastern Orthodoxy nor Judaism subscribe to the Western concept of original sin, but rather accept the reality and consequences of ancestral sin (with the former) and/or that humans do possess an inclination to sin (with the latter, termed the *yetzer hara*), but it is not imputed, inherited, nor inevitable (Louth, 2020; Shults, 2003; Smith, 2019). Furthermore, it is recognized by many cultures worldwide that humans seem to possess, whether inborn or otherwise, a nature inclined toward violence or evil (McCall, 2019), but it is only the Western stream of Christianity that offers as efficient cause for such sin, violence, or evil (call it what you will) the concept of original sin. With that, I will briefly mention here some other aspects that Sproul (2015)

[2] To note, Shults (2003) distinguishes between the concept of inherited sin and original sin, the former being how we possess the latter. However, what is gleaned from the literature, as well as how it is presently received, the two ideas together often comprise the concept of original sin. Both were Augustinian theories, regardless: "Augustine . . . introduced the words "original sin" (originale peccatum) . . . and for the rest of his life consistently taught that sin originated in the transgression of Adam and was transmitted from generation to generation through human reproduction" (Toews, 2013, p. 85). Also, Calvin (2009) defines it as such: Original sin, then, may be defined a [*sic*] hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature . . ." (Book II.1.8). Hence, the concept of original sin used herein is to be understood as the idea that humans sin because we have inherited a corrupted and depraved nature that can only sin, i.e., we have an *inherent* sinful nature because it was *inherited*.

referenced but did not expand upon, and to which most Western Christians will also readily subscribe and speak of.

Part of the explanatory power of the doctrine of original sin lies in the interpretation of the story it is founded upon in Genesis 3, which is considered "the fall of mankind" or simply termed "the Fall" by Western Christians, who would summarize it with some version of the following:[3] Adam and Eve, who were the first humans and parents of humanity, disobeyed God's command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve had enjoyed an originally perfect[4] and innocent state of being, but they "fell" from this state by their disobedience—their "original" sin—which immediately and irrevocably corrupted their nature and, as such, that resultant sinful nature was passed along through Adam's seed to the rest of his progeny, i.e., humanity. While there are other details of the doctrine that vary among Western Christian traditions, e.g., whether humanity has also inherited Adam's guilt before God or the extent of sin's reach and effect in our being, the predominant core belief remains: because of Adam's disobedience humans have inherited and are thus born with a nature that manifests sin, i.e., we have an inherently sinful nature, and that is why we sin.[5]

The Reformation of Original Sin

While the doctrine of original sin has been firmly established since the 5th century AD, it

[3] Some consider the Fall a separate doctrine, but herein it is considered part of the doctrine of original sin as the Fall narrative is implicit in the doctrine and from which it is derived. Again, this is Western Christian theology as most Jews do not consider Genesis 3 as the fall of mankind (Levine & Brettler, 2020), and Eastern Orthodoxy takes a more nuanced view of the Fall and its implications (Louth, 2020).

[4] Only God is perfect and the first humans—while created good and innocent—cannot be considered as such. However, in the reception and retelling of the Fall narrative, one will often hear the concept of perfection being applied to Adam and Eve, e.g., "our first parents, the historical Adam and Eve, had been made in the image of God and were morally and spiritually perfect" (Macleod, 2014, p. 146). As will be seen in Chapter 2, this concept originated in the West with Bishop Ambrose of Milan in the 4th century AD.

[5] Herein only the central tenet, or concept, of the doctrine—original sin as an inherited and inherently sinful human condition—will be discussed. As stated, different traditions hold to other details or degrees of import and impact, but the central tenet of original sin is common to most (if not all) Western traditions.

was arguably during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century AD that the doctrine and its resultant anthropology acquired a more persistent pessimistic character. Carried along in the teachings of the highly influential Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin, humanity came to be viewed not just as inherently inclined toward sin, but rather as sinful in its very essence.[6] For example, in his commentary on Psalm 51, Luther (2017) stated: "[s]in must be looked into much more deeply . . . [and] set forth much more clearly" (p. 15); "we must not confine it to these external sins, but must consider it as penetrating into the whole nature, the fountain-spring and the origin of sin" (pp. 17-18). Luther (2017) then went further:

> It is therefore great wisdom to know that *we are nothing but sin* [emphasis added], that we might not think lightly of sin as the Pope's teachers do, who define sin to be a word, or an act, or thought against the law of God. Whereas do you define it according to this Psalm, that *the whole of that which is born of father and mother is sin, even before the person can by reason of age do, say or think anything* [emphasis added]. For from this root nothing can be born that is good before God. (p. 20)

Building on that view in his commentary, Luther (2017) inferred the following from Psalm 51:5:

> For [David] now shows the cause and as it were opens the foundation of the whole matter—why he thus confessed his sin and implored mercy. "Because," says he, "I was shapen in iniquity." . . . He does not speak of any particular actions, but speaks of the matter itself, and says, *"That human seed, that mass out of which I was formed, is wholly polluted by evil and sin. The matter itself is corrupt, that clay (so to speak) out of which this vessel began to be formed is damnable. And what need I say more. Such am I, and*

[6] Among the many things the Protestant Reformation birthed, one of them was this reformed view of sin, and with it came a renewed emphasis upon sin that remains a distinct characteristic of Western Christianity, but arguably more so among Protestant traditions over against Roman Catholicism.

> *such are all men. The very conception, the very formation of the foetus in the womb, before we are born and begin to be men, is sin!"* [emphasis added] (p. 81)

This legacy of Lutheran thought has been retained and informs present day Lutherans as evidenced in their confessional and doctrinal standard, *Book of Concord*, where it is stated:

> That not only is original sin (in human nature) such a complete lack of all good in spiritual, divine matters, but also that at the same time *it replaces the lost image of God in the human being with a deep-seated, evil, horrible, bottomless, unfathomable, and indescribable corruption of the entire human nature* [emphasis added] and all of its powers, particularly of the highest, most important powers of the soul, in mind, heart, and will.[7] Ever since the fall, the human being inherits an inborn evil way of doing things, an internal impurity of the heart, and an evil desire and inclination, so that we all by nature inherit such a heart, mind, and way of thinking from Adam. (Kolb & Wengert, 2000, pp. 533-534; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article I)

One will find similar sentiments from Calvin (2009) within his seminal reformational work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*:

> After the heavenly image in man was effaced,[8] he not only was himself punished by a

[7] Luther (1858) repeatedly stated in his commentary on Genesis that the image of God was "lost", but his understanding of that image appears to be more analogous to an original state of righteousness: "Wherefore I, for my part, understand the image of God to be this;—that Adam possessed it in its moral substance, or nature—that he not only knew God, and believed Him to be good, but that he lived also a life truly divine; that is, free from the fear of death and of all dangers, and happy in the favour of God" (p. 90). Consider also, "that image of God, in which Adam was created, was a [*sic*] something excellent above all things: in which was included eternal life, eternal security, and all good. That image however is so marred and obscured by sin, that we cannot reach the comprehension of it, even in thought. For though we utter the words 'the image of God,' who is there that can possibly understand what it is, for a man to live a life of security, without fears, and without perils? and to be wise, righteous, good, and free from all calamities or distresses, either of soul or of body?" (Luther, 1858, p. 93)

[8] Notably, Calvin (2009) had previously stated in Book I: "Wherefore, although *we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him* [emphasis added], it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity" (Book I.15.4).

> withdrawal of the ornaments in which he had been arrayed - viz. wisdom, virtue, justice, truth, and holiness, and by the substitution in their place of those dire pests, blindness, impotence, vanity, impurity, and unrighteousness, but he involved his posterity also, and plunged them in the same wretchedness. This is the hereditary corruption to which early Christian writers gave the name of Original Sin, meaning by the term the depravation [*sic*] of a nature formerly good and pure. . . . The orthodoxy, therefore, and more especially Augustine, labored to show, that *we are not corrupted by acquired wickedness, but bring an innate corruption from the very womb* [emphasis added]. (Book II.1.5)

Calvin (2009) also offered a more succinct definition of original sin amidst his extensive commentary on the subject:

> Original sin, then, may be defined a [*sic*] hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh. (Book II.1.8)

He then continued on to express the extent of the "corruption and depravity of our nature" with the following:

> For our nature is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle. Those who term it *concupiscence* [i.e., inordinate or harmful desire, or lust] use a word not very inappropriate, provided it were added (this, however, many will by no means concede), that everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, is defiled and pervaded with this concupiscence; or, to express it more briefly, that *the whole man is in himself nothing else than concupiscence* [emphasis added]. (Calvin, 2009, Book II.1.8)

Furthermore, and to be clear, Calvin (2009), as well as Luther (Batka, 2014), considered concupiscence—and therefore, "the whole man"—as sin itself:

> There is this difference apparently between [Augustine] and us, that while he admits that believers, so long as they are in the body, are so liable to concupiscence that they cannot but feel it, he does not venture to give this disease the name of sin. . . . *We again regard it as sin whenever man is influenced in any degree by any desire contrary to the law of God; nay, we maintain that the very gravity which begets in us such desires is sin* [emphasis added]. (Calvin, 2009, Book III.3.10)

As with Luther, Calvin's theology has also been carried forward, most notably among Presbyterians, but its more recent and vocal expression in the 21st century is "New Calvinism,"[9] which was considered one of the top 10 ideas changing the world in 2009 by TIME magazine (Van Biema, 2009), and has had some prominent voices and influence in the U.S.

> New Calvinism is characterized by pastors who prize Calvin and those who share Calvin's basic convictions in their preaching and thinking, such as J. I. Packer, John Piper, Matt Chandler, R. C. Sproul, Mark Dever, and at one time [as part of the TIME cover story] Mark Driscoll. These New Calvinist leaders use two particular key terms, which have come functionally to be synonymous, to distinguish the movement theologically. These terms—"Reformed" and "Calvinist"—have encircled the movement to delineate its theological distinctives. (Maxwell, 2021, p. 19)

Per my own observation, I find that assessment to be true, i.e., Reformed theology is increasingly conflated with Calvinism—at least within the U.S.[10] However, Calvinism does not constitute the

[9] One may also see or hear the terms "Neo-Calvinism" or "Neo-Reformed" to describe this movement.
[10] It can be argued this conflation came about organically given the U.S. was founded by Puritans, who were staunch Calvinists, hence there are deep theological and cultural roots which will find resonance with Calvinism and thus fuel its expression and revival.

whole of reformational theology, which is expressed in various ways throughout all Protestant traditions and, furthermore, owes an enormous debt to Martin Luther (among others).[11] However, it is arguably the New Calvinists, over against any Lutheran contingent, that are stoking the proverbial fires of reformational theology with the U.S., and thus giving it a distinctly Calvinistic flavor.[12] Part of that flavor is the New Calvinist emphasis on a central tenet termed "total depravity," derived from Calvin (as per the aforementioned quotes, but also notably in concert with Luther), and defined as "a maximalist conception of the moral corruption of human nature in that it is not possible to conceive of a degree to which humans could be morally corrupt greater than the conception represented in [total depravity]" (Maxwell, 2021, p. 18).

Regardless of who or what rightly claims the name "Reformed," it appears clear from the examples taken from both Luther/Lutheranism and Calvin/Calvinism that the predominant view of humanity among many adherents of Reformed theology is one of hopeless and radical corruption that effectively decimated the image of God in which we were made, and has thus rendered us inherently and totally depraved at our core, incapable of producing anything other than bad, perverse, wicked, or evil desires, thoughts, and deeds.[13] In sum, we are not just inherently inclined to sin, we *are* sin and, thereby, can do nothing but sin in our natural selves. Furthermore, per the Reformed view from Luther and Calvin, we never stop being this way.

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[11] Reformed theology is indebted to many more than Luther and Calvin, such as Philip Melanchthon, Zacharias Ursinus, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Knox, just to name a mere few from the 16th century AD alone.

[12] The reader is referred to Collin Hansen's (2006, 2008) work, *Young, Restless, Reformed* (the book and article bear the same title), that offer a journalistic witness to Calvinism's resurgence in the U.S. Furthermore, as a result of this most recent resurgence, Calvinism has been finding its way into historically non-Reformed/Calvinistic traditions as well, and is a more prominent characteristic (or theological flavor) in American Evangelicalism (Oppenheimer, 2014), which is comprised of many different Protestant traditions.

[13] For the sake of discussion, I will refer to this view of original sin and humanity as presented herein as Reformed, but it is important to note not all traditions and teachings descending from the Protestant Reformation hold to this maximalist view, e.g., see Stump and Meister (2020). However, as stated in n. 10, Reformed theology is infiltrating many Western Christian traditions, regardless of their historically held beliefs. With that, TIME's assessment of New Calvinism as a top 10 idea changing the world in 2009—or at least the U.S—had merit (Van Biema, 2009).

Consider these statements from Calvin (2009), which bookend those quoted previously regarding concupiscence:

> All writers of sound judgment agree in this, that, in the regenerate man, there is still a spring of evil which is perpetually sending forth desires that allure and stimulate him to sin. They also acknowledge that the saints are still so liable to the disease of concupiscence, that, though opposing it, they cannot avoid being ever and anon prompted and incited to lust, avarice, ambition, or other vices. . . . Accordingly, *we hold that there is always sin in the saints* [emphasis added] until they are freed from their mortal frame, because depraved concupiscence resides in their flesh, and is at variance with rectitude. (Book III.3.10)

Luther's (2017) understanding was similar and "[radicalized] the teaching about original sin" (Batka, 2014, p. 238), in that concupiscence—which is original sin (Batka, 2014) and the whole of who we are per Calvin (2009) and Luther (2017)—"cannot be 'washed away' even in baptism. Concupiscence remains in the sinner even after baptism" (Batka, 2014, p. 238). Furthermore, "[t]his continuation of sin and evil in the lives of God's chosen people remains a mystery, beyond human solution in this life" (Kolb, 2014, p. 114). With that, according to Luther (but in concert with Calvin), while being baptized into Christ washes away the associated guilt and brings forgiveness of sin, the sinful nature remains (Batka, 2014), i.e., even in Christ, we are still, in essence, sin. This idea so pervades Luther's teaching on original sin that it has been summarized in the circulating phrase: Christians are "snow-covered dung."[14] While that has not been found to be a direct quote from Luther, it is consonant with what Luther (2017) came to believe and teach:

[14] A Google search using the phrase "snow-covered dung" will provide ample evidence to support this statement.

> But here arises a theological question: how can we become "whiter than snow" when the remnants of sin still ever adhere to us? I answer: I have often said that man is divided into flesh and spirit. As to the whole man therefore, the remnants of sin, or as Paul calls them the "filthiness of the flesh and spirit," still remain. . . .Therefore, in respect of that purity which we have in spirit by faith, through Christ and the sacraments ordained by him, the Christian may be rightly called "whiter than snow," nay, purer than the sun and the stars, even though these defilements of the spirit and flesh may still cleave to him; *for they are all covered and buried by the cleanness and purity of Christ* [emphasis added], unto which we attain by the hearing of the Word and by faith. (Luther, 2017, p. 109)

Given the voluminous works of both Luther and Calvin (as well as those of the many proponents of the doctrine of original sin throughout the centuries), much more could be said and argued—usually by those in the academy—regarding what Luther, Calvin, or any of their associates and disciples, truly intended to be understood about original sin and human nature. However, the multiple direct quotations from Luther and Calvin were offered to let readers discern and draw their own conclusions, which is ultimately what matters. How such teachings get received, perpetuated, and applied by people in the pulpits and pews within our current context matters more because life plays itself out "in the streets" and not in ivory towers.

The Reception of Original Sin

Within literary studies, *reception theory* considers how a literary work is received by the reader, e.g., how the reader personally interacts with or assimilates the work, or draws inferences, meaning, and connections from the work (Carter, 2006). Reception theory is thereby useful in theology when one considers the biblical text, as well as associated creeds, confessions, commentaries, or doctrines, are all forms of literature being received by readers situated within

and informed by their respective contexts that are often far removed from that of the original author (Carter, 2006; Rush, 1997). With that, authorial intent can become secondary (or sometimes unnecessary) as literature is publicly received and passed on through history, where both the interpretation of and "[t]he texts themselves are actually altered by the ways in which they are received in each period" (Carter, 2006, p. 88). Furthermore, "[i]t may be possible . . . to evaluate how a work was interpreted when it first appeared *but this does not establish a permanent or final meaning* [emphasis added]" (Carter, 2006, p. 88). In essence, and as it applies to doctrine, each generation can receive a doctrine into their context and interpret it anew (or not) to fit their context and provide meaning for life and living. Examples of reception theory as described can be seen in the cited works of Luther and Calvin above, particularly with Luther's reception and interpretation of Psalm 51:5, and Calvin's departure from Augustine on the meaning and implication of concupiscence. The phrase "snow-covered dung" to describe the human condition in Christ is another example of a more recent reception of Luther's teachings on the doctrine of original sin and its resultant negative anthropology. Lastly, as evidenced by Figure 1, this Reformed view of original sin and humanity is primed to be perpetuated given its reception in younger generations.

Figure 1

Screenshot of an Instagram Story by Christians Who Curse Sometimes

Figure 1 is a screenshot I took on September 16, 2021, of an Instagram story from the U.S. based account, Christians Who Curse Sometimes (CWCS, 2021). Instagram stories only last 24 hours, so this poll was taken, posted, and captured within that amount of time. CWCS (2021) had posed the question, "What have you always wanted to ask Christians?" to its followers, the number of which at the time was well over 100,000, and the majority of whom I suspect were/are Millennials or members of Gen Z (or age equivalents if from outside the U.S.), which I base on my observation of the account activity over the months prior and Instagram user demographics.[15] I also presume most followers identify as Christian, which is again based on my observations, as well as the following statement: "CWCS is a community to expand your faith. We believe it's important for Christians to ask questions and deepen their faith by finding answers that are biblically sound, and in line with Christ's teachings" (CWCS, n.d., para. 1). Given that context, among the many questions submitted anonymously and subsequently posted as polls that day, Figure 1 shows the response to "Do you think that humans are sinful at our core?" I sent a direct message to the account owner, who remains anonymous to followers, asking for the number of people who responded to that question and the response was, "we had about 25k votes total" (CWCS, personal communication, September 16, 2021). With that, about 21,000 people, the majority of whom are likely 40 years of age or younger and identify as Christian, answered "yes" to that question, thus affirming the belief that humans are sinful at their core. While certainly not an official result from empirically based and generalizable research, I believe it is a strong straw poll that reflects how the doctrine of original sin has been received, understood, and perpetuated in the 21st century, resulting in the persistent, pessimistic, and dominant Western Christian

[15] For example, the account helps connect people to one another for various reasons, and most of the ages given in personal descriptions are in the 20s and 30s. But furthermore, Statista Research Department (2022) found that as of October 2021, 78.1% of Instagram users worldwide were between the ages of 18-44 years.

narrative about human nature informed by the Reformed theology of original sin as presented herein. Indeed, the doctrine remains highly influential and formative, and the Reformed view continually defended and promulgated (e.g., Jones, 2022; Madueme & Reeves, 2014; McCall, 2019). Furthermore, holding, or even shifting to, the Reformed view of humanity is not difficult in the current global climate, nor at any time in just the last century alone given the ample evidence of human evil worldwide, e.g., multiple large-scale wars and genocides, terrorist attacks, and the general escalation of violence in all spheres of society—and that is stating only the most obvious and public forms of human evil. Indeed, it does appear that humans are sinful at their core—for what other reason could we attribute all this evil in our midst?

My Preoccupation with the Western Preoccupation with Sin

Given all of this thus far, how could I have possibly been struck dumb by the statement: "Never underestimate the power of the sinful nature"? How could I have been struck dumb by a statement that affirms what is easily observed in the current global milieu, could be uttered and supported by a vast number of Christians, and something I could have (and may have) said at one time myself? The answer requires some personal context.

First, at the time it was said I was doing what I had previously not done—challenging beliefs and traditions I had accepted (and then taught) without question. Challenging, in the sense employed here, is not some form of rebellion or assuming an oppositional or antagonistic stance; it is a process of vetting, verifying, and being responsible with and for my beliefs—especially those I pass on through discipleship and teaching (cf. James 3:1). *Why* did I believe what I claimed to believe? I had somehow employed this in every other area of my personal and professional life, but not when it came to matters of faith. Furthermore, it was something I distinctly felt the Lord leading me to do—lit. "challenge your traditions"—to which I was slow

to respond, but when certain major life events later occurred that created significant dissonance between my faith and my lived experience, it launched me into deeper critical analysis, and nothing was off limits. It was an intense multi-year process (that continues in many respects) and served to shift some perspectives and paradigms.

Second, the idea that I was *inherently* sinful (or bad, perverse, wicked, or evil) never truly resonated with me; it was something I resisted internalizing ever since being called upon to confess and believe it at the age of seven as part of "saying yes" to Jesus. Even though I came to intellectually accept it later in life and then taught it to others as a foundational biblical principle, the idea that I, and all of humanity, was naturally bad and bent towards evil did not resonate deep within my spirit. Some may instantly think such a contrary statement to a well-established doctrine—regardless of which Western Christian tradition one adheres to—is proof of pride and/or rebellion and thus demonstrates my inherent sinfulness and subsequently corrupted mind, which I can understand given the prevailing belief and dominant narrative. However, I am not saying I have not sinned, will never sin again, or could not be called a sinner as a result. I am, instead, challenging the belief that I—along with the rest of humanity—am *essentially and inherently* a sinner (or *sin* itself, if taking on the verbiage from Luther and Calvin). The distinction being made is important to highlight because it goes beyond volitional behavior to defining the very essence of our being, i.e., our ontology. While the Reformed view was already presented and established the nature of our being as sin itself, I want to briefly revisit and restate the concept of original sin to reframe the argument and use it to draw out some implications.

Recall the following from Sproul's (2015) aforementioned statement, which is derived from Reformed theology: "It's not that we are sinners because we sin, but rather, we sin because we are sinners." The distinction being emphasized is that we are sinners *not* because we have

sinned, but that we sin *because* we are sinners (or sin), first and foremost. It is a matter of who we are and not what we have done. We *are* sinners before we ever sin. Being a sinner is part of our identity from birth. Our ontology—the nature of our being—precedes and produces our behavior. We are born to sin because we *are* sin; thus, we cannot help but sin because it is our very nature to sin, i.e., nothing can come from sin but sin. To further accentuate the gravity of Sproul's (2015) distinctive statement we can employ a simple word exchange: we are not criminals because we have committed a crime, we commit crime *because* we are criminals, first and foremost. We are already a crime because we exist. I could be wrong, but I would venture to say people do not identify themselves as criminals prior to committing a crime, nor that their existence constitutes a crime in and of itself. Even after breaking a law—consider something as simple as violating traffic laws, thus technically committing a crime (cf. James 2:10)—most would not consider themselves ontologically, or even consequentially, a criminal, thus destined to commit more crime. Yet that is, in essence, what many Western Christians believe about all of humanity due to the Reformed (or Reformed-informed) concept of original sin—we are sinners (or criminals) from birth.[16] It is who we are, and it is why there is so much evil in the world.

So given that context and reframed understanding, when I heard the words, "never underestimate the power of the sinful nature," I was hearing it anew, and it no longer sounded rational or reasonable—it sounded sinister, which struck me dumb in the moment. Like a deer caught in the headlights, I did not respond to it, and the conversation carried on regardless and

[16] As mentioned in n. 9, not all Protestant traditions hold to the Reformed view presented herein, however Reformed theology has still been assimilated into historically non-Reformed traditions. For example, Barna Group (2010) "found that 31% of pastors who lead churches within traditionally charismatic or Pentecostal denominations were described as Reformed, while 27% identified as Wesleyan/Arminian. This is somewhat surprising given that these denominations . . . are generally viewed as stemming from Wesleyan or Holiness traditions" (Who is Reformed? para. 4). Furthermore, the research showed that "most of the nation's 300,000 Protestant churches are in a state of theological flux, apparently open to identities and trends that do not necessarily fall within expected denominational or doctrinal boundaries" (Research Observations, para. 2). This has allowed the Reformed theology of the influential New Calvinists to be more easily assimilated into U.S. church culture (van Biema, 2009; see also n. 10).

shifted onto another topic. However, I walked away from the conversation with those poignant words hanging in the air, demanding further attention, and this dissertation reflects the attention I have given to it since.

The Inherent Problem of Original Sin

Sinister. I did not choose that word flippantly. I am not even sure I chose that word as much as it was given to me as I reflected on the underlying tone and tenor in which the statement was said. Because that statement flows from the doctrine of original sin, I am effectively stating the doctrine (and especially the Reformed view), ironically enough, is sinister. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the "essential meaning" of *sinister* is "having an evil appearance: looking likely to cause something bad, harmful, or dangerous to happen." It is the latter part of the definition that I find most applicable to the doctrine of original sin, i.e., believing that humans are inherently sinful (or sinners), in the manner and extent previously described, is "likely to cause something bad, harmful, or dangerous to happen," which renders the doctrine inherently problematic. I recognize this is a bold assertion regarding a central doctrine—some even consider it *the* central doctrine—of Western Christianity that has held sway for 16 centuries; however, it has never been without its detractors from its inception.

Before expounding upon how I see the doctrine, and specifically its central concept of original sin, as inherently problematic, I want to first state what I *do not* have a problem with when it comes to the doctrine. It is very clear sin is a problem. There is no shortage of evidence that humans can do—and have done, are doing, and will continue to do—bad, perverse, wicked, or evil things. Sin needs to be taken very seriously. Sin is harmful and destructive to our very selves, others, and all of creation, thus making it very grievous, painful, and offensive to our Creator. When we sin, we incur guilt before God and others and bear personal responsibility for

our sinful attitudes, actions, and behaviors, and all their vast consequences. Given that humans naturally seek or create meaning, it is understandable to desire an explanation for why humans sin, for without explanation or efficient cause there can be little offered by way of solution—and sin is a problem in need of a solution. The doctrine of original sin addresses all these elements, i.e., it highlights the problem of sin, its seriousness, its deleterious effects, its offensiveness and grievousness to God, the guilt and responsibility humans bear, and has offered a theory for why humans sin, which has carried explanatory power for centuries and continues to resonate with many people. Lastly, the doctrine serves as a strong reminder that we have fallen short of the glory of God (see Rom. 3:23), i.e., there is a standard, or way of being in the world that God has created us for and expects of us, and that we have fallen short of. With that, it reminds us of our need for God and God's ways. These are all good and necessary things that are intrinsic to the doctrine.

That said, how is the concept of original sin inherently problematic?[17] I will answer, in part, by asking questions for consideration, which will hopefully open the reader's mind to possibilities. Could there be a problem with viewing humanity as *essentially and inherently* sinful (or bad, perverse, wicked, or evil) as the concept posits? Consider the following from author Danielle Shroyer (2016), who tells of a similar story to the one I shared at the outset:

> My sweet friend Susan comes from a hardy Dutch Reformed family.[18] She told me that when her grandmother came to visit new grandbabies in the hospital, she would cuddle them and say, "Ooooh, you're such a little sinner!" I can't say I'd ever heard the word "sinner" used as a term of endearment before that. (p. 157)

[17] As stated previously, and per notes 3 and 4, the details of the *doctrine* vary to some degree among traditions, but the *concept* of original sin—that we are inherently sinful—is central to most (if not all) Western Christian traditions, and is the focus of this dissertation.

[18] The Dutch Reformed have deep Calvinist roots.

Could there be a problem in viewing, identifying, or labeling a newborn baby as a sinner (or as a criminal, to use the word exchange from above)? Or as inherently bad? Or as essentially wicked? Or as hopelessly destined to commit acts of evil? How might viewing an infant (or toddler, child, and adolescent) in such ways impact the parent/caregiver-child relationship, as well as the developing identity of the child from within that relationship? How might this view of humanity impact how we view and relate to one another (individually and collectively), as well as God, or how we think God must view and relate to us?[19] Lastly, is there any problem in believing and internalizing such a pessimistic self-concept—e.g., that we are "dung," or at best, "snow-covered dung"? Based on empirical research and clinical expertise (e.g., Brown et al., 2019; Fowler et al., 2012; Shapiro, 2012; van der Kolk, 2014), as well as personal experience, I believe all these views are deeply problematic because how we view (or what we believe about) ourselves, others, and God directly influences how we relate to self, others, and God (and even creation)—for good or for bad.[20] Furthermore, if our theology perpetuates a narrative that tells us (or more specifically, we believe *God* tells us) we are inherently bad and so is the rest of humanity, it can justifiably lead us down paths towards hatred of self and others (Maxwell, 2017). With that, and considering both individuals and collectives, is it then possible assimilating and internalizing the concept of original sin, which delivers such a pessimistic anthropology, serves to generate and

[19] In a sermon delivered on October 9, 2011, Mark Driscoll (then a prominent voice of the New Calvinists) provided a salient example of how God views us through the lens of original sin: "Some of you, God hates you. Some of you, God is sick of you. God is frustrated with you. God is wearied by you. God has suffered long enough with you. He doesn't think you're cute. He doesn't think it's funny. He doesn't think your excuse is meritorious. He doesn't care if you compare yourself to someone worse than you. He hates them, too! God hates, right now, personally, objectively hates some of you. He has had enough! He is sick of it! . . . The Bible speaks of God not just hating sin, but sinners, because sin is of our nature. Sin is not just a mistake that we make. It's not that we're good people, down in our heart, who had a bad moment. In our worst moments is the truest revelation of who we really are at the deepest level. . . . You and I are sinners, and we are, by nature, objects of wrath. . . . God doesn't just hate what you do. He hates who you are!" (Mars Hill Church Archive, 42:49, 2011)

[20] Notably, these views of self, others, and God are often implicit, i.e., we are not consciously aware we hold such views and beliefs, but they nonetheless influence how we relate to self, others, and God.

perpetuate sin? Consider at the most basic level how thinking poorly of (or hating) others tends to make us act poorly towards others, both of which can be considered sin (e.g., see Matt. 5:21-22; 27-30). At more complex levels, collective thinking along those lines leads to pervasive sin and evil through the establishment of prejudicial, oppressive, or totalitarian systems that sow discord and division into societies, and bring death and destruction through acts of violence and the waging of war. Faith communities are no exception as theologies built upon the concept of original sin can create—as I have both witnessed and participated in—an exclusionary, or "us vs. them" mentality that not only applies broadly to nonbelievers, but also to fellow professing Christians who happen to hold to different traditions or interpretations of Scripture, thus greatly confounding the ability to love both neighbor and enemy well (or at all).[21] This is why *sinister* comes to mind; in promoting a negative view of self, others, and/or God (with all the implications those views bring), as well as potentially generating and perpetuating sin on individual and collective levels, the concept of original sin does—and has done—great harm to humanity, which is its inherent and unacknowledged problem.

The Implications of Original Sin

Aside from the inherent problem and implications just described, there are several other implications to consider. The doctrine of original sin, at least as it has been received and applied in the Western Christian context that I experience in the U.S., places sin and the sin nature as central to our belief system, which effectively adjusts and narrows our focus and ministerial efforts to monitoring and managing sin in our lives, local communities, and world. This not only

[21] One could catch a hint of the well-known animosity Luther (2017) held towards the Pope and Catholicism in the first block quotation on Psalm 51 cited previously, and such animosity has been characteristic of much of Protestantism since the Reformation. Furthermore, many Reformed thinkers consider their theology "orthodox," which was verbiage used by Calvin (2009) in an aforementioned quote establishing original sin as such, and contrary views (e.g., Pelagianism) have been, and are still currently, deemed heretical. The fate of heretics at the hands of the "faithful" has varied along a spectrum of violence from excommunication (relational violence) to death (physical violence).

informs our anthropology, as already discussed, but also (among other things) our soteriology, i.e., how and from what we are saved, and, thereby, our understanding of the gospel. With that, the following is a non-exhaustive list, and in no particular order, of potential implications resulting from centering the concept of original sin in our theology (all of which I have observed and see as problems in and of themselves):

- It places our identity and reality in sin rather than in Jesus.
- It places focus on seeing and calling out our sin and the sins of others, instead of seeing and calling forth the image of God in us all.
- It renders us as inherently evil rather than inherently good (our original state), thus denying in part or *in toto* the image of God in all of humanity.
- It (as already stated) negatively impacts our view of self, others, God, and creation.
- It is antithetical to the command to love others as we love ourselves (see Mark 12:31), thus hindering us from obeying this central commandment.[22]
- It gives power to sin and hinders the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.[23]
- It places focus on restraining sinful behavior rather than on becoming like Jesus (which notably has the effect of restraining and eliminating sinful behavior).
- It places soteriological emphasis on retribution (punishing disobedience) rather than restoration (healing and restoring the image of God in humanity).
- It places emphasis on Jesus' death for our sins (punishment and retribution) rather than on his life, mission, and gospel message (mercy and restoration).
- It places sin and the punishment of sin as central to the gospel, rather than the invitation

[22] As a result, Western Christians tend to be known more by their sins than their love.
[23] Recall the opening statement: "Never underestimate the *power* [emphasis added] of the sinful nature."

to heal, "sin no more" (see John 8:11), live an abundant life, and participate in bringing about the restoration of all things in, with, and through the resurrected and enthroned Christ whose death conquered satan, sin, and death.

Reformulating Original Sin: The Central Thesis

Given the inherent and implicit problems with the doctrine and concept of original sin, one wonders how long it can remain tenable. However, the doctrine is the only offering to explain *why* people sin, and its explanatory power monopolizes Western Christian theology. Furthermore, removing the doctrine would create an unacceptable void (and proponents would say it also guts the gospel (e.g., Madueme, 2020; McCall, 2014), as their understanding of the gospel is founded upon it). Accordingly, is there any other way to understand why people sin (and hence, understand the gospel), such that it *reformulates* the doctrine to still deal with sin, but in a more hopeful, healing, and restorative manner? As stated, sin is a problem in need of a solution, but that solution must be based on proper understandings of humanity, sin, and salvation that are consonant with God's character, ways, and purposes as exemplified in Jesus. With that, is there any other way to understand the Fall narrative from which the doctrine finds its basis that would dually resonate with who God is and how he relates to us in Christ, as well as provide an alternate and more tenable understanding of why people sin that promotes healing, restoration, and a positive anthropology, over against the current understanding that promotes harm, retribution, and a negative anthropology? I believe so, and hopefully I can convince the reader of the same.

To summarize, I am stating the doctrine of original sin, with its central concept of original sin, particularly as informed by Reformed theology, is inherently problematic. When the concept of original sin as presented herein is believed and/or internalized by both individuals and

collectives, it carries several negative implications, most notably in the form of negative cognitions that negatively impact identity formation and a sense of self, perception of others (to include God), and, therefore, relationships with self, others, God, and, by extension, creation. This can then hinder believers from genuinely loving self, others, and God, and instead bring about harm, as well as establish a barrier—because the sin nature is considered immutable—to individual, communal, and global healing and restoration (i.e., salvation) from the effects of sin, which is the end goal of God for all creation.[24] I am also stating, in agreement with Shults (2003), the doctrine of original sin is only one offering—one theory—of why people sin, and in light of recent advances in scholarship across several disciplines, "[t]he diminishing plausibility of this hypothesis calls for a response" (Shults, 2003, p. 6). This dissertation will serve, in part, as such a response for consideration by arguing for understanding sin as part of and resulting from a trauma response incurred by relational injury and/or otherwise unmitigated and unexpected events, to which our Christlike and humane response should be merciful and facilitating of healing and restoration that begets more healing and restoration (thus diminishing sin), rather than judgment and retributive punishment that only begets more of the same (and more sin). Furthermore, in arguing for understanding sin as part of a trauma response, I will present an alternate reading of the Fall narrative by setting it within its larger context and using the interpretative lenses of relationality and trauma to reveal the "original" trauma sustained by Adam and Eve that ushered sin and death into the world, and how that unresolved trauma feasibly begot more trauma (and more sin) in the next and future generations, i.e., a cycle of unmitigated and unresolved intergenerational and transgenerational trauma originated that we still contend with and perpetuate today. However, as will be further shown, such cycles can be

[24] "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (*New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition* [*NRSVue*], 2022, Matthew 1:21).

interrupted and reversed, thus bringing about healing and restoration, over against the concept of an immutable and inherent sinful nature that cannot be rectified. Lastly, I will employ attachment theory to illustrate the deleterious effects of trauma on human formation, as well as how trauma is passed down transgenerationally, but then also argue for attachment being the manner through which we are saved and by which God can restore humanity, i.e., healing and restoration occurs through developing a secure attachment to God.

Methodology

As stated, the doctrine of original sin has been and is central to Western Christian theology, being held by Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. However, the details of the doctrine and perceived degree of severity of original sin vary among those traditions while the core concept of original sin, i.e., that humans have an inherently sinful nature, transcends most, if not all, Western Christian traditions.[25] Herein I have presented what I have dubbed the Reformed position on the concept of original sin (thus setting aside at this time any other details of the larger doctrine that may be held by Reformed adherents), which is a maximalist view delivering a pessimistic anthropology that states, in sum, we *are* sin and thus inherently sinful from conception and, furthermore, we never stop being this way even when baptized into Christ. This centuries-old Reformed understanding of the human condition is consonant with present-day New Calvinism's concept of total depravity that draws from John Calvin's theology, but is also in concert with that of Martin Luther, and it is this Reformed view of original sin that will be

[25] Given the vast multiplicity of Protestant traditions since the Reformation, it is impossible to state categorically that all hold to the doctrine of original sin. However, having descended from the Reformation, and still being a part of the Western stream of Christianity, it would be reasonable to state all traditions hold to the concept of an inherently sinful nature to some degree (e.g., see Stump & Meister (2020) for various views), with the Reformed view described herein as being the maximalist view.

engaged in this dissertation.[26]

Given my ecumenical background, I do not lay claim to any specific Christian tradition, and therefore do not consider myself an adherent of the Reformed tradition; however, I have been and still am inextricably influenced by it given I have dwelt among Protestants since my baccalaureate years, and, as presented, once held to a similar view of original sin in humanity as informed by the Reformed tradition. In engaging the Reformed concept of original sin, I will attempt to stay true to some other core Reformed beliefs in my argumentation, i.e., I will meet the Reformed on some of their terms to show how an alternate interpretation of the Fall narrative is tenable and a reformulation of original sin plausible.

First, as with the Reformed, I hold a high view of Scripture and believe it is divinely inspired, thus in proposing a reformulation of the concept of original sin it must be, and will be, grounded in Scripture and not science, although the latter will be incorporated where applicable and considered through a theological lens. That said, whether my high view of Scripture matches that of the Reformed is arguable. The doctrine of inerrancy to which they hold is informed by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Here is the "short statement":

> 1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
>
> 2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that

[26] While the maximalist Reformed view will be engaged methodologically, the argument will ultimately challenge the concept of an inherently sinful nature in humanity no matter the degree or detail held by any Western Christian tradition.

> it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
>
> 3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
>
> 4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
>
> 5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.
>
> (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978, p. 3)

As far as I interpret each of those statements, I would agree with much; but the crux *is* interpretation,[27] and for many, affirming the inerrancy of Scripture means one must affirm *one* interpretation of Scripture, which the subsequent Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics alludes to: “We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed” (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1982, Article VII). I do not agree with that since I am, in fact, proposing an alternate interpretation of the Fall narrative over against that of the dominant interpretation evidenced in the doctrine of original sin. However, I believe my proposal still honors biblical inerrancy, thus giving the Reformed an alternate interpretation to consider without abandoning that core belief.

[27] I take exception to declaring Holy Scripture as God’s Word (with a capital W). Jesus is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, to whom all of Scripture points and in whom finds its ultimate consummation and meaning. With that, I consider Scripture from a Christotelic/Christocentric standpoint. Furthermore, I believe our interpretation and subsequent application of Scripture is better served by the hermeneutical circle, which does not deliver a singular and fixed interpretation.

Second, in aligning with C. John Collins (2014) and Hans Madueme (2014), both professors in official institutions of the Presbyterian Church in America, and who therefore hold to Reformed theology and traditions, I will "[base my] arguments on the presupposition that the human race began with an actual Adam and Eve, and that God made this couple morally innocent, and that evil came into human experience by way of this couple's sin" (Collins, 2014, p. 32). Collins (2014) affirms that in my doing so I am "basing [myself] upon a good reading of the Old Testament: both as to the specific texts, and as to the logic of the story" (p. 32).

Lastly, to discuss how science and theology can relate methodologically, Madueme (2014) proposed the method of "scriptural realism [that] draws on classical themes within the Reformational traditions" (p. 240), and "is a three-stranded cord of biblical inerrancy, (qualified) pneumatic certainty, and an eclectic approach to scientific theories" (p. 244). Madueme (2014), while invoking Calvin, defines pneumatic certainty commensurate with the third point in the short statement on biblical inerrancy noted above:

> The assurance of biblical authority, [Calvin] says, comes from "a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit." Christians know that Scripture is authoritative with a theological certainty: "the testimony of the Spirit," Calvin says, "is more excellent than all reason."
>
> This internal testimony of the Holy Spirit induces in believers a theological certainty of the divinity of Scripture. . . . we can call this a *pneumatic certainty*, by which we mean that autonomous human reason does not have final authority over faith. (pp. 241-242)

I agree with this premise, as well as Madueme's (2014) third element in his three-stranded cord of scriptural realism, which is

> to adopt an *eclectic approach* to scientific theories. Scholars in science-and-theology, influenced by Barbour, almost always recommend integration or dialogue as the best way to relate science and theology. Most dismiss the independence approach. Conflict is the ultimate heresy; it is the pariah that threatens all interdisciplinary dialogue. My question is: why should we choose sides? Theology should be eclectic in how it engages with science. Christians should engage scientific theories on a case-by-case basis. (p. 243)

I appreciate this approach, and in this instance, I believe integration is an acceptable consideration. Per Barbour (2000), *integration* is

> [a] more systematic and extensive kind of partnership between science and religion [that] occurs among those who seek a closer integration of the two disciplines. . . . [Some] start from a particular religious tradition and argue that some of its beliefs (ideas of divine omnipotence or original sin, for instance) should be reformulated in the light of science. Such an approach I call a *theology of nature* . . . (p. 12).

Barbour (2000) further explains:

> A theology of nature does not start from science, as natural theology usually does today. Instead, it starts from a religious tradition based on religious experience and historical revelation. But it holds that some traditional doctrines need to be *reformulated* in the light of current science. Here science and religion are considered to be relatively independent sources of ideas, but with some areas of overlap in their concerns. In particular, the doctrines of creation and human nature are affected by the findings of science. If religious beliefs are to be in harmony with scientific knowledge, more extensive adjustments or modifications are called for. . . (p. 43)

To close, Madueme (2014) developed his methodology in response to his own query:

"The central question is this: Should modern scientific knowledge compel Christians to abandon or radically revise the doctrine of original sin—and if so, how?" (p. 227). He was speaking in terms of evolutionary science, but trauma theory falls under the umbrella of "modern scientific knowledge" as well. Even though, from what I can glean, trauma theory was not in his purview, I will still honor his proposed methodology as I believe it remains applicable. Therefore, in sum, I will be adhering to the tenets within the "Reformational traditions" mentioned herein while seeking to integrate theology with current science (specifically in the realm of trauma theory and attachment theory) to propose reformulating the doctrine of original sin.

Structure of Dissertation

With the introduction to the problem and methodology already stated, the remainder of this dissertation is structured in a manner that presents and discusses foundational themes that integrate with one another to support and argue the central thesis. In Chapter 1 we will consider how sin has been historically conceptualized. How we understand sin influences how we address it, and if we begin with a skewed or limited view, our solutions will be as well; furthermore, our understanding of sin also informs our understanding of the doctrine and concept of original sin, and most notably the interpretation of the biblical story that undergirds it. While Christians of all traditions have an implicit idea of what sin is, one must consider if it is the same as how it was viewed and expressed in the Hebrew Bible and during the time of Jesus. Rather than being understood only as an act of breaking God's laws, it will be shown that sin has a deeply relational context and is essentially a relational breach that needs to be, and can be, repaired.

Next, while we have already defined the doctrine and concept of original sin in this introduction, as well as the inherent problems and implications therein, Chapter 2 will consider the history of its development and reveal the context that shaped and then galvanized it as an

essential Western Church doctrine. It will be seen that the doctrine is an attempt to make sense of the sin we see in the world and ourselves, as well as some early church traditions (e.g., infant baptism), and is therefore a theological construction from teachings of early church fathers and theologians combined with their interpretation of specific Scriptures—hence, a theory—and not an obvious explication derived from the entire canon of Scripture. Furthermore, the importance of understanding a proper causation of sin will be discussed, as our understanding of causation informs our solutions for the problem of sin in our lives and the world. This assessment leads to understanding the need for a reformulation of the doctrine and concept of original sin, which will then introduce trauma as an efficient cause of sin.

With that, in Chapter 3 we will turn our attention to understanding and defining trauma, specifically psychological trauma, to which the term *trauma* and its derivatives will refer throughout this dissertation unless otherwise specified. We will see how our understanding of trauma developed in fits and starts, often against much resistance, but finally found a measure of acceptance in the late 20th century with the establishment of "posttraumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) as an official diagnosis, which was a watershed moment in the conceptualization of trauma's causation. However, trauma has since become ubiquitous and those afflicted and/or impacted (i.e., everyone) need a better understanding of its causes, as well as subsequent access to resources that can effectively address the pervasiveness of trauma, which, as will be shown, has been constrained and limited by the PTSD diagnosis and its single-event criterion. While the history of trauma is still being written, and the etiology and pathophysiology still being discovered and validated, we will at least see how trauma is currently understood, defined, and employed by professionals working with the traumatized, and discover that it, too, is a deeply relational experience, which will be applicable to later discussion.

Chapter 4 will give an overview of attachment theory. Despite the ongoing development of trauma studies and the relative nascency of its body of knowledge, there is robust evidence regarding the importance of attachment, which is beginning to be seen, and will be presented herein, as related to trauma. Attachment is both a need and a life-long process from cradle to grave, as we inherently seek attachment to others that will not only meet our basic needs for survival (e.g., food and shelter), but also give our lives foundational meaning and ongoing relational support. Furthermore, and arguably most important, attachment is also the means through which we derive and form our identities, learn to relate, and develop worldviews. While the ideal is to have safe and secure attachments, the reality is that is not always the case, and insecure attachments are prevalent. Regardless of the quality of our attachments, we will be formed and transformed by them throughout life. Furthermore, these attachment patterns (secure or insecure) are passed along transgenerationally; however, and most importantly for later discussion, it will be shown that attachment patterns are not permanent, and can therefore change, giving hope for those with insecure and/or traumatized patterns of attachment to attain secure attachment and find healing and restoration.

Having established the foundational themes of sin, original sin, trauma, and attachment, in Chapters 5 and 6 we will do an in-depth reading of Genesis 2 and 3, respectively, using the interpretive lenses of relationality and trauma. Reading the text relationally reorients the reader to the deeply relational nature of God, and how we are made from, for, and through relationship with self, others, God, and creation (which draws in elements of attachment theory). It is the primacy of relationship in the story that then brings about the profound trauma that occurs in the aftermath of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is a reality lost when the focus is simply on the associated element of disobedience. With that, it will be seen how it

was not the disobedience itself, or anything precipitating the disobedience, that was inherently transformative of human nature and subsequently shattered all relationships represented in the garden—it was trauma, and specifically, unmitigated and unresolved trauma. Furthermore, it is that unresolved and internalized trauma that Adam and Eve then carry into their own relationship and the relationships with their children that sets off a cycle of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma that indeed manifests itself in sinful behavior, thus appearing as if it comes from an inherently sinful nature; however, it is instead a series of internalized and embodied trauma responses that—unlike the proposed sinful nature—can be addressed, healed, and through which, humanity can be restored.

The final chapter will serve as a combined conclusion and proposal for a solution to the problem of sin based on trauma as an efficient cause. Because an efficient cause of sin is attachment trauma, interpersonal trauma, or other single-event or chronic traumas, the solution, which is our salvation, is found in healing, repairing, and restoring the afflicted from the effects of trauma while attaining secure attachment to God, i.e., we are reborn into a relationship with God, who is our safe and secure parent who effectively forms and transforms us unto the likeness of Jesus, who is our developmental *telos.* This is how Jesus saves us. In choosing to follow and become like Jesus we heal from the effects of trauma and insecure attachment, repair relationships with self, others, creation, and God, and be progressively restored to reveal our inherent goodness and the image of God within us. In the process, sin is found to abate, intergenerational and transgenerational trauma can be ceased, and the process of bringing about the restoration of things can continue in earnest until it finds its eschatological fulfillment in Jesus. Lastly, a section discussing topics for further study will be included therein.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Sin

As expressed in the Introduction, sin holds a prominent place within Western Christian theology, and arguably more so in Protestantism than Roman Catholicism due to the emphasis the Reformers placed upon it.[28] This emphasis, which has been and continues to be predominantly influenced by Calvinism in the U.S., has held sway from the time of the Puritans on through to present-day adherents of Reformed theology—as well as the many more who have been influenced by it—so as to keep sin and the sinful nature at the forefront.[29] Consequently, the monitoring and management of sin in our lives and the world has become paramount, which has significantly influenced American Evangelicalism (Oppenheimer, 2014) and, by extension, its evangelistic methods that, accordingly, center on sin and the sinful nature.

Consider a common evangelistic spiel that follows along these main points:1) you are a sinner because you sin; 2) you deserve to die and go to hell, but 3) Jesus came to die in your place, so 4) if you admit you are a sinner and believe Jesus died for your sins, 5) you will be saved (from hell, which is what is both syllogistically and generally implied). Other variations may add qualifiers such as "repent of your sins," "ask for forgiveness," "ask Jesus into your heart," or couch it in some manner with "God loves you," but the overriding emphasis remains on sin and being a sinner, as well as the punishment for such.[30] Notably, this is in stark contrast to Paul's evangelistic[31] presentation in his letter to the Romans:

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[28] Recall Luther's (2017) assessment: "Sin must be looked into much more deeply . . . [and] set forth much more clearly" (p. 15), so "that we might not think lightly of sin as the Pope's teachers do . . ." (p. 20).

[29] While Reformed theology places heavy emphasis on sin and the sinful nature, most, if not all, traditions and denominations descending from the Protestant Reformation would tend to place sin central in their theology, as most, if not all, hold to the doctrine of original sin to some degree.

[30] Chick tracts and (arguably) mid to late 20th century evangelists (e.g., Billy Graham and Ray Comfort) helped popularize this line of thinking and the associated "sinner's prayer." Furthermore, unpacking the history and theology behind it all is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is a common spiel still heard today that reveals the prevalent understanding of sin based in a crime and punishment model.

[31] The term *evangelism*, and its cognates, comes from the Greek word *euangelion* meaning "good news," which is also what the term *gospel* means. Evangelists share the gospel message but understandings of what the gospel is

> But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (*New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition* [*NRSVue*], 2022, Romans 10:8-13)

Paul emphasized placing faith in (or pledging allegiance to) the risen Jesus as Lord as the means by which all are saved, without any mention of sin, punishment, or hell.[32] To restate, Paul's salvific confession centers upon "Jesus is Lord," while American Evangelicalism's salvific confession, as informed by Reformed theology, centers upon "I'm a sinner."[33] Emphasizing our sinfulness is what is deemed to matter most because sin is what must be managed to mitigate the evil in the world, especially in light of Reformed theology that states we are sin and will never stop being sinful.[34] Therefore, most people in the U.S. are introduced to and understand

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vary and, therefore, so do the accompanying evangelistic messages, which can be seen here with the examples from Paul contrasted against that of American Evangelicalism.

[32] Notably, Peter's first sermon in Acts 2 emphasizes and omits the same element, but this also begs the question: what did Paul mean by "saved"? If not from hell, then what? Saved, and its cognates, derive from the Greek word *sozo*, which means, primarily, to be rescued or delivered, which was what the Jews hoped for in Messiah for their people corporately. This would be a basic understanding for 1st century Jews, and a personal salvation from hell (as understood today) would not be in view.

[33] This emphasis also shifts focus from Jesus as Lord over all whose intent is to bring about the restoration of all things, onto the individual and attaining a personal salvation, which neglects the collective restoration of humanity and creation of which Paul (and Jesus) spoke. Furthermore, Paul assuredly confessed his own sin and dealt with the sin plaguing the churches, but his gospel proclaimed, "Jesus is Lord," over against, "I'm a sinner."

[34] One must consider further that, in Reformed theology, Jesus has no effect on this condition, i.e., no power to transform the human condition—as the Reformed view it—in this present life. Given this, it is no wonder Jesus' death tends to be emphasized much more than his life and teachings, as it is only his death that accomplishes anything for us (removes guilt and punishment), whereas his life and teachings are deemed impossible to follow, or follow with any consistency.

Christianity—as well as how God views them—through the lens of sin, but more specifically, *through their understanding of sin*.

Richard Taylor (1945), who was an American Nazarene (Wesleyan-Holiness) theologian and professor, opened his text, *A Right Conception of Sin* (wherein he engages and critiques Calvinism), with the following: "Sin, as one doctrine of the Christian system, is the common denominator of the other doctrines" (p. 9).[35] He explains further in his opening chapter:

> The doctrines relating to sin form the center around which we build our entire theological system. . . . And as Christians, *if our conception of sin is faulty, our whole superstructure will be one error built on another* [emphasis added], each one more absurd than the last, yet each one necessary if it is to fit in consistently with the whole erroneous scheme. If we are to end right we must begin right, and to begin right we must grapple with the question of sin in its doctrinal significance until we have grasped the scriptural facts relating to sin in all of its phases. We need to know exactly what sin is, of what kinds, how it acts, its effects, its relation to man, how it must be dealt with, and God's provision for it. (Taylor, 1945, pp. 9-10)

While building an entire theological system upon sin is not something with which I agree—I believe it should be built upon and begin with Jesus as Lord, our chief cornerstone (see Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:19-20)—I do agree with the rest, especially that "we need to know exactly what sin is," even though "exact" knowledge may escape us given the multilayered and multifaceted process of interpretation of ancient texts written by ancient people with their embedded ancient concepts, of which sin is. Nevertheless, assessing our understanding of sin is essential because, in agreement with Taylor (1945), "if our conception of sin is faulty" it will impact how we

[35] This shows that it is not just the Reformed who center sin in their theology, they just do so in a distinctive way.

perceive sin and understand its various manifestations, how it affects people individually and collectively, how it affects God, and, arguably most importantly, how we are to effectively deal with it, i.e., what is the solution for the problem of sin? A common response is that Jesus is the solution (per Matt. 1:21), which is true, but in what way(s) is Jesus the solution?[36] The problem and nature of sin must be examined further before we can determine how Jesus saves us from our sin, for as Taylor (1945) states: "If we are to end right we must begin right." Biddle (2005) frames this concept well with the following:

> Just as a physician's diagnosis of an ailment matters with regard to the course of treatment he or she chooses, it matters how the church and theologians define sin—what is wrong—and salvation—how God through Christ makes it right again. (p. vii).

In sum, how we comprehend the problem—in this case, sin—is how we will come to determine and employ the solution. But it is important to note that how we comprehend something is based upon, and therefore limited to, what we know about it. To play off Biddle's analogy, if a doctor has limited knowledge and understanding of a disease process, or incorrectly assesses symptoms and misdiagnoses based on limited knowledge and experience, the subsequent treatment will be, at best, ineffective to bring about complete healing and, at worst, can prove deadly. Therefore, it behooves us to assess our knowledge and understanding of sin—which brings death (see Rom. 6:23)—so we may employ effective solutions that heal, restore, and bring life (see John 10:10).

[36] A preconceived or presupposed solution without a correct or full understanding of the problem influences how we view the problem, and essentially causes us to reformulate or perceive the problem differently to fit our defined and desired solution. The solution then creates the problem, which can effectively miss determining the true nature of the problem that is still in need of a proper solution. With that, one must begin with a thorough assessment of the problem and derive a proper and efficacious solution.

What is Sin?

So, what do we mean when we speak of sin? When spoken of in general conversation, or even in the context of preaching and teaching, it is often done with the preconception that all parties understand sin the same way—especially its cause, effects, and God's dealings with it—yet given the various theological streams of Christianity, that is not necessarily true.[37] However, there are certain colloquial common denominator definitions of sin, such as "the bad things we do" or "disobeying God" or "anything contrary to God's character, will, or commands," i.e., definitions that speak to transgressing moral or divine laws, which accord with a survey of literature on the topic. A sampling of both Jewish and Christian sources over the last century-plus all render sin primarily as some form of willful disregard, defiance, or rebellion against God and God's revealed will (e.g., Haarsma, 2021; Jacobs & Eisenstein, 1905; McCall, 2019; Rhymer, 1989; Taylor, 1945), and "God's revealed will" is the operative phrase for many. But what is God's revealed will?

> The laws [given to Israel at Mount Sinai] spell out what it means 'to obey me and keep my covenant'. For Jews—and in varying degrees for Christians too—*these laws are the revealed will of God, and sin is understood to be the breach of them* [emphasis added]. (Rhymer, 1989, p. 468)

Indeed, it is common to hear some form of that sentiment, i.e., sin is breaking God's laws (or commands), from those in the pulpits and pews, especially given explicit Scriptural support such as, "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." (*NRSVue*, 2022, 1 John 3:4). But what may galvanize this understanding of sin for many in the West is this oft referred to quote from arguably the most influential Latin Church Father and shaper of Western

[37] For example, Taylor (1945) discusses and argues against the Calvinist conception of sin and the theological system built around it, while contrasting it with his Nazarene theology and conception of sin.

Christianity, Augustine of Hippo, writing in 400 AD:

> Sin, then, is any transgression in deed, or word, or desire, of the eternal law [which is frequently seen in its original Latin: *Ergo peccatum est, factum vel dictum vel concupitum aliquid contra aeternam legem*]. And the eternal law is the divine order or will of God, which requires the preservation of natural order, and forbids the breach of it. (Augustine, n.d., Reply to Faustus the Manichæan, Book XXII, para. 27)[38]

Therefore, the dominant understanding and definition of sin as received in the West is that of disobeying or breaking God's law. But is that all there is to understand about sin? And what are the implications of that generally accepted definition? Furthermore, how are we drawn to deal with sin given that understanding? The latter two questions will be addressed first.

A Matter of Metaphor: Sin as Crime

> Both the moralist and the evangelist assume a specific, limited concept of sin quite firmly entrenched in Christian tradition. In the West, the dominant model of sin and salvation—developed especially in the thought of Tertullian, Augustine, Anselm, and Abelard—has long relied on court room analogy. Human beings in willful rebellion against God's authority violate God's law. Their crime incurs the penalty of death. (Biddle, 2005, p. viii)

Biddle (2005) summarizes well the dominant Western Christian understanding of sin: it is limited, its dominance and entrenchment is due to a long history of support from early Church Fathers and theologians, it views "sin as crime" (p. viii), and the sinner is found guilty via a judicial process under the law and subsequently deserves capital punishment (which, in concert

[38] Notably, and as presented in the Introduction, it was this definition Luther (2017) thought too "light": ". . . that we might not think lightly of sin as the Pope's teachers do, *who define sin to be a word, or an act, or thought against the law of God* [emphasis added]" (p. 20). However, it remains a common understanding of sin within Western Christianity, and Augustine could be considered its fountainhead, or at least its primary purveyor.

with the dominant atonement theory in Western Christianity, is dealt with via the penal substitutionary death of Jesus). Such a view of sin continues to find strong support in the West, especially in the U.S., where "law and order" rhetoric has long been a part of governance and politics and recently saw a resurgence of emphasis during the Trump Era (Kilgore, 2020). Law and order rhetoric in the U.S. can arguably find its roots in the declaration of "war on crime" (Hinton, 2015, para. 1). Notably, we have declared war on other things, such as the "war on drugs" and the "war on terror," i.e., the war metaphor abounds in U.S. culture, as does the crime metaphor for sin (Biddle, 2005), and those metaphors significantly inform our thoughts and actions.

The work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003) has elucidated just how powerful metaphors are in our development and understanding of concepts, as well as how we subsequently respond and operate:

> *Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature* [emphasis added].
>
> The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical [and decades of linguistic studies since have borne this out], then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (p. 11)

Therefore, the words we choose to explain or describe something matter because of their metaphorical significance in helping us understand or convey meaning. To help someone

comprehend a concept we tend to use terms that represent other independent concepts, i.e., concepts that are more concrete and can stand independent of context (and often culture) or further explanation, such as tree, father, or war (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Each one of those examples can stand alone and represent a clear concept in the minds of the hearers (or readers), which can then be used to help describe or define other concepts, e.g., a family tree, church father, or culture war. With that, in returning to the "war on crime" (or drugs, or terror) we can clearly understand the meaning behind the words, the posture being taken towards the issues, and the nature of any subsequent action. When we use war as metaphor, we conjure up literal images of war that dictate how the issues of crime, drugs, or terror will be addressed. There is little sense that the issues will be addressed through solution-focused discussion, civil debate, diplomacy, or any other manner of conciliation or restoration, but instead the issues will be engaged through use of force, overt battle, retributive violence, and often significant destruction or death of the opponent that secures victory. In the examples given (crime, drugs, and terror), the declaration of war was followed by a subsequent increase in law enforcement and militarization of the police (Hinton, 2015), and an actual, immediate war to contain and squash any future terror threats. Therefore, metaphors matter because they largely determine conceptualization, and conceptualization determines what something becomes (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

In turning to the "sin as crime" metaphor (or SIN IS CRIME as Lakoff & Johnson (2003) would render it), *sin* is the concept being described and *crime* is the independent concept used to define it, which is generally understood as an activity that breaks a law. For clarity, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) states the "essential meaning" of *crime* as "1: an illegal act for which someone can be punished by the government . . . 2: activity that is against the law . . . 3: an act that is foolish or wrong." Interestingly, it is only in the last definition that sin is used as an analogous

example; however, Western Christians place sin within the first two definitions because sin is foremost understood as a breaking of God's law. To restate, if sin is breaking God's law, this naturally (in our collective Western mind) makes it a crime, and we deal with crime through a judicial process—or sometimes war, which only accentuates a retributive response to sin as we can contextually link metaphors in our mind, i.e., SIN IS CRIME and we have declared war on crime. Such are the implications when sin is comprehended as and acted upon as crime. Furthermore, given SIN IS CRIME, the word exchange employed in the introduction finds substantiation. Sproul's (2015) original statement was: "It's not that we are sinners because we sin, but rather, we sin because we are sinners" (para. 3). But employing the metaphor SIN IS CRIME, the statement can be read as: "It's not that we are criminals because we committed a crime, we commit crime because we are criminals." While we would eschew such a statement, how Western Christians think about and respond to sin and sinners is still through the metaphor of crime, even if left unsaid.

While it has been previously affirmed that sin is a problem, is it truly a crime that—in line with Taylor's (1945) argument above—justifies establishing a theological system built on law and order, judicial process, and some form of "just," i.e., retributive, punishment (even capital punishment)? Or have we missed something in our understanding of sin (and thereby constructed an erroneous and ineffective theology)? We might infer as much if we consider Gregory the Great's statement from his commentary on the book of Job written in the late 6th century AD: "There is this difference between 'sin' and 'crime,' that all crime is sin, but not all sin is crime. And in this life there are numbers without crime, but no one can be without sins" (Gregory I, 1844, p. 531). With that, we uncover an inherent problem with the use of metaphor: we lose sight of other salient aspects of what may be a multifaceted concept (e.g., sin) for which

a metaphor (e.g., SIN IS CRIME) is being employed (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Consider the following statement Lakoff & Johnson (2003) make after using the metaphor of war to describe the concept of argument, i.e., ARGUMENT IS WAR:

> The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another (e.g., comprehending an aspect of arguing in terms of battle) *will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept* [emphasis added]. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g., the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor. For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects. (p. 18)

Such is what we do with the concept of sin. SIN IS CRIME is a superficial and inadequate conceptualization of sin as it does not consider the humanity of those who sin, e.g., their intentions, motivations, relationships, hardships, or context, and simply relegates sin to breaking a law.[39] With that, we return to the previous question that asked what more there was, if anything, to understanding sin beyond that of breaking God's law, which can now be rephrased as: what aspects of sin may have been hidden from view by the metaphor of crime that can be revealed to give a clearer and fuller understanding of sin?

[39] To consider the humanity of those who sin is *not* tantamount to absolving them of their responsibility and guilt in sinning. They still bear consequences and responsibility, but being reminded of their humanity engenders a humane, merciful and restorative response, rather than one of judgment, punishment, and retribution.

More Than a Metaphor: Reappraising Sin

The English language has essentially one word for sin—sin—and as we have seen, understanding it as a concept necessarily draws the use of metaphor, which is not only limiting, but can also be problematic if we relegate sin to a single metaphorical concept such as crime. Other metaphors have been employed specific to the biblical narrative, which Anderson's (2009) research on the history of sin revealed, and where he also affirmed the necessity of metaphor: "It is not easy to define a sin. If we pay attention to how people talk, we notice that metaphors are impossible to avoid" (p. 1). Within the Hebrew Bible,[40] Anderson (2009) notes that among the many metaphors employed to describe the nature of sin, the most notable "are those of sin as a stain from which one must be purified . . . and of sin as a weight that must be borne" (p. 16). With the former, sin was viewed as leaving a stain upon the individual or Israelite community who must be washed clean of it, i.e., purified, through ritual purification offerings (e.g., see Lev. 4).[41] When sin was regarded as a weight, or burden to be borne—which is the most common metaphor seen in the Hebrew Bible (Anderson, 2009)—it was dealt with in the Israelite community by ceremonially placing that burden, i.e., their sins, on a scapegoat that was then sent off into the wilderness to rid the community of sin (see Lev. 16:20-22).

However, those metaphorical concepts (and the corresponding methods of atonement) eventually gave way to a new metaphor that emerged during the time of Persian rule and the Babylonian exile, which is when Israel became bilingual in Hebrew and Aramaic, with Aramaic significantly influencing Hebrew language development (Anderson, 2009). "One of the linguistic

[40] The Hebrew Bible is the equivalent term for the Christian Old Testament and will be used throughout to honor the Jewish people, culture, and history.

[41] Nearly all Bibles render this offering as "the sin offering," save for the newly updated *NRSVue* (2022), which renders it "the purification offering," which has been argued for as the better English equivalent (Alter, 2019; Milgrom, 1971). With that, the blood from the offering cleanses and purifies, and does not connote a life-for-a-life concept.

items that came on board was the construal of sin as a debt, a metaphor implied in the Aramaic tongue, but not in the Hebrew" (Anderson, 2009, p. 8). The type of payment for debt incurred by sin was then influenced by Israel's experience of exile combined with the concept of debt-slavery in the Ancient Near East, as Israel imagined herself as being punished for her sins by being enslaved in exile, and "the physical punishment of exile served as the means by which Israel raised 'hard currency' to pay off the debt she owed" (Anderson, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, physical punishment came to be seen as a method of payment. This concept of sin as debt with associated penalty payments (that ranged from monetary payments to physical death) endured and informed Israelite/Jewish thought throughout the Second Temple period, and, as a result, persists today:

> In much of the New Testament, as well as in all of rabbinic literature and Aramaic-speaking Christianity, the primary metaphor for sin is that of a debt. The Dead Sea Scrolls, then, [which employed such language and metaphor] mark an important transition point to what became the dominant emphasis of later Judaism and Christianity. (Anderson, 2009, p. ix)

Therefore, in sum, over the course of more than a millennia, the concept of sin was not fixed and static but changed from being a stain to be cleansed or a burden to bear to a debt to be paid, and each had associated means of atoning for sin based on the metaphor employed at the time. The latter concept of sin as debt continues to dominate and—combined with also viewing sin as crime—has informed resulting atonement theories. What is most often heard in Western pulpits and pews is "the payment for sin is death," which should not be conflated with—but was assuredly influenced by—Paul's words: "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).[42] With that, in

[42] As stated earlier, sin is what brings death, i.e., death is the *natural consequence* of sin. Hence, death is the wage of sin, rather than the payment for sin—it is what you "earn" from sinning rather than what you pay for it after the fact.

much of Western Christian thought and theology, Jesus's death accomplishes two things based on the dominant metaphors of sin as crime and sin as debt—it covers the (presupposed) penalty and the payment.

What is interesting (and somewhat perplexing) about Anderson's research is it focuses upon the metaphors derived from the biblical text for the English word *sin* without engaging the multiple Hebrew words (or Greek equivalents) that get translated as sin. Bashevkin (2019) notes:

> As instructive as metaphors can be in the analysis of sin, it is also important to keep in mind that the range of metaphors does not necessarily represent the collective scope of the meaning of sin. . . . A metaphor is a window to understanding, but it is important not to fixate on windows and to consider the words for sin from other vantage points. (pp. 5-6)

Lipinski and Jacobs (2007) would concur:

> In biblical Hebrew there are about 20 different words which denote "sin." It may be inferred, therefore, that the *ancient Israelites had more concepts expressing various nuances of sin than Western thought and theology* [emphasis added]. A study of the biblical concept of sin, therefore, cannot disregard the diversity of words denoting sin. (p. 621)

What's in a Word?

Of the many words used in the Hebrew Bible to denote *sin*, it is primarily expressed in three main forms (which include their roots and derivatives): *het, avon,* and *pesha* (Bashevkin, 2019). *Het* (or *khata*) is the most ubiquitous form and simply translates to *sin*; *avon* is the next most frequently occurring form (about half that of *het*) and translates to *iniquity*; and *pesha* occurs the least amount of times (a third that of *het*) but is considered the most egregious form of

sin and is translated as *transgression* (Bashevkin, 2019; Jacobs & Eisenstein, 1905; Lipinski & Jacobs, 2007).[43] Bashevkin (2009) notes that each of these words "tells a different story about the nature of sin itself. Both the imagery of each term and the distinctions among them offer insight into how sin and failure should be considered in Jewish thought" (p. 13), and I would also argue, Christian thought. We will consider each of these words in more detail, but in reverse order as presented above.

Pesha. *Pesha* comes from the Hebrew root word *pasha,* which is a verb meaning "to rebel" or "transgress," and *pesha* is a noun that is translated accordingly as *transgression*, *trespass*, or *rebellion*, the latter of which qualifies it as the "gravest kind" (Jacobs & Eisenstein, 1905, p. 376) as it often pertains to willful rebellion against God. *Pesha,* though, is any form of betraying or breaking trust with others, such as a breach of covenant (Lipinski & Jacobs, 2007), so it is personal, intentional, and "involves one person or group violating a relationship of trust with another" (Bible Project, 2018b, 2:13; McCall, 2019), which serves to demonstrate the relational nature of transgression. To restate, *pesha* is not an unintentional, impersonal, or detached act of wrongdoing, it is a willful, personal violation of the trust that had been built between two (or more) parties.

A Greek equivalent is *paraptoma,* which is used to denote, like *pesha*, the intentional nature of the transgression (Bible Project, 2018b; McCall, 2019). In Romans 5:12-20, Paul uses *paraptoma* (along with *hamartia*, defined below) to speak of Adam's sin in Genesis 3, which indicates the nature of the "original" sin was breaking trust with God, rather than just breaking

[43] Bashevkin (2019) aptly notes in Talmudic Judaism "the names for the different sins are based upon the motivation of the sinner. An otherwise minor infraction can be classified as a *pesha* if the sinner committed such an act as a marked act of rebellion against God. Conversely, an egregious sin can be characterized as a *het* if the sin was unintentional. . . . Contrast the Talmudic approach to the different categories of sin to the different categories of crime in American law: infractions, misdemeanors, and felonies. . . . [which all have punishments that fit the crime]. . . . Blurring the distinction between crime—categorized by the punishment assigned to it—with sin, which is gradated by the intention of the perpetrator, has warped our view of sin and crime" (pp. 7-8).

God's law (Bible Project, 2018b). The distinction is important. The *pesha* and *paraptoma* type of transgression is not about acts or behaviors as much as it is about the breaking of trust, i.e., it is a relational breach. However, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, it is the act of disobedience (breaking God's law) that tends to be emphasized in the doctrine of original sin, which fits well with the dominant metaphor and understanding of sin as crime, but demonstrates how the metaphor effectively hides a deeper meaning or added dimension that prevents us from grasping an essential understanding of the "original" sin—that it was a breach of relationship.

Avon. *Avon* (also seen as *awon*) lends itself to various meanings based on context and is derived from the Hebrew root word *avah*, which is a verb meaning "to be bent or crooked" (Bible Project, 2018c, 0:51). *Iniquity* is one way *avon* gets translated, which can be thought of as "crooked" behavior that strays from God's desired ways, and can be characterized by the breaking of God's laws, e.g., the Ten Commandments or, as spoken of often by the prophets, turning a blind eye to injustice and oppression (Bible Project, 2018c). But with that, *avon* also represents the natural consequences of crooked behavior, thus referring to the hurting and oppressed people, broken relationships, associated guilt, or retaliatory vengeance that result from such iniquity (Bible Project, 2018c; Lipinski & Jacobs, 2007). To restate, while it appears *avon* primarily represents aberrant behavior, it also represents the consequences of that behavior, much of which is relational; therefore, *avon* has a relational dimension. Furthermore, *avon* is primarily used as a theological term and not one for juridical use (Lipinski & Jacobs, 2007), which adds emphasis to its relational nature as theology prioritizes—or it should prioritize—our relationship with God and one another. For example, consider its use in Isaiah 59:2: "your iniquities (*ʿawonot*) have been barriers between you and your God (*NRSVue*, 2022), i.e., "*ʿawonot* set up a wall between the Lord and the sinner" (Lipinski & Jacobs, 2007, p. 622).

Hence, the emphasis for *avon* in that instance is placed within the context of relationship and its effects therein, rather than upon the act of breaking the law.

As has been the point of emphasis in this chapter, we should consider whether *avon* or its root *avah* can provide any further understanding regarding iniquity (or sin), especially given the various ways it can be used given different contexts. To do so, let us consider a significant portion of McCall's (2019) description of *avon*:

> In the [Old Testament], *'āwōn* is more focused on the personal causes—and effects—of sin. Often appearing in English translations as "iniquity" or "guilt," the word connotes twistedness, and the basic idea is one of perversion.
>
> Directly in contrast to what is straight, upright, well-formed, and healthy, sin is what is morrally (sic) misshapen, crippled, broken, misleading, and crooked. Again, this presupposes something that is right, well-formed, and healthy, and it paints a picture of sin as the twisting or perversion of that rightness and health. But the emphasis in this case clearly falls upon personal engagement. It is not as if the sinful person merely suffers the effects of (someone else's) sin; rather it is the sinner who willfully chooses that which ultimately will warp and twist him to the core of his being.
>
> The sinful actions (of *ḥaṭṭā'*, *ḥaṭṭā't*) come from an inner twistedness or perversion (*'āwōn*). (McCall, 2019, Chapter 2.II.A, *Āwōn,* paras. 1-3)

To note, it should be recognized that when Westerners (Christian or non) discuss such topics as sin or crime, more often than not they are spoken of—and also received—in an inherently pessimistic tone, which is understandable given a culture of law and order (with retributive justice). However, approaching a study of sin in such a manner can potentially blind us to seeing other possibilities that can inform a more comprehensive understanding of the

multifaceted and nuanced nature of sin.[44] To illustrate, in reading *perversion* in the second sentence of the quotation above, what immediately came to mind? Was it something inherently negative or repulsive in nature, or perhaps the idea of sexually aberrant behavior (a definition now seen regularly in online dictionaries)? Or did a more balanced and historically representative thought present itself, perhaps in accord with that of the Oxford English Dictionary:

> The action of perverting or condition of being perverted; the action of turning aside from what is true or right; the diversion of something from its original and proper course, state, or meaning; corruption, distortion . . . (Oxford University Press, n.d., 1a)

The point is, perversion (*avon*)—as it pertains to people—is a resultant state after being directed away from an original "true or right" state of being, regardless if the turning was volitional or not, which McCall (2019) speaks of, but then seems to emphasize the volitional aspect. While we can and do willfully choose courses of action that result in our *avon*, the *avon* that results in us from the iniquity of another (individual or collective) cannot be minimized or dismissed.

McCall (2019) notes in his definition that *avon* focuses more on the personal causes and effects of sin—our own, but also that of others. As *avon* is derived from *avah* (to be bent, crooked, or distorted), it can be considered our *avon* also derives from our being made bent, crooked, or distorted (again, of our own doing or from external causes). As we will consider trauma in a later chapter, it will be seen how trauma can leave us in a state of *avon* after being traumatized, or made bent, crooked, or distorted from a state that was once, as McCall (2019) states, "right, well-formed, and healthy." In fact, one can swap out *sin* for *trauma* without

[44] This is assuredly not meant to be a judgment on McCall (2019) and his robust study on sin, but more so to help reveal the implicit biases and presuppositions we all carry into our research and conversations that can serve to highlight and perpetuate a dominant perspective, while neglecting or dismissing other perspectives, thus preventing us from seeing the bigger picture.

changing the meaning of the following sentence of McCall's (2019) from above: "Again, this presupposes something that is right, well-formed, and healthy, and it paints a picture of [trauma] as the twisting or perversion of that rightness and health." Furthermore, the traumatized frequently do sin as a manifestation of their trauma (or *avon*), e.g., sowing discord, being divisive, or causing harm to self and others through violent behavior or speech. Or, as McCall (2019) stated appropriately: "The sinful actions (of *ḥaṭṭā't*, *ḥaṭṭā't*) come from an inner twistedness or perversion (*'āwōn*)."

Lastly, it should also be remembered that *pesha*, *avon*, and *het* are not used interchangeably for *sin*, but rather represent distinctive characteristics of the larger concept of sin that we would do well to pay attention to in the biblical text to enhance our understanding and better inform interpretation. For example, consider the following:

> The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity (*avon*) and transgression (*pesha*) and sin (*hatta'ah*), yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity (*avon*) of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (*NRSVue*, 2022, Exodus 34:6-7)

Here all three distinctives are represented, as well as God's forgiveness of them all, but it is only the iniquity (*avon*) that is visited upon future generations, which harkens to the concept of intergenerational sin that, as I would argue, stems from unresolved intergenerational trauma, i.e., the *hatta'ah* that comes from the *avon.* It is not the volitional choices characteristic of *hatta'ah* and *pesha* that get passed along, which would not make sense as they are, indeed, individual choices made in the moment given a particular context. However, unresolved trauma begets

trauma in others, as those who have bent, twisted or distorted natures tend to bend, twist or distort others, i.e., the relational dimension of *avon* begets *avon* in future generations, and also gives rise to *hatta'ah* and *pesha*. The reader is encouraged to bear this in mind for future discussion.

Het (or Khata). *Khata* is a Hebrew root word and verb that is translated to *sin*, and from which originates other common words for sin, e.g., *het, hata',* or *hatta'h.* Its Greek equivalent in the New Testament is *hamartia.* "The most basic meaning of *sin* isn't religious at all. *Khata* [and *hamartia*] simply means "to fail" or "miss the goal" (Bible Project, 2018a, 0:49), and this could be used to describe anything such as (the widely used example of) an arrow missing its mark or when someone fails to arrive at an intended destination (e.g., by getting lost). Bashevkin (2019) speaks of it as a "missed opportunity, [where] sin serves as a foil for a target" (p. 5). Because the non-theological term of *khata* (or *het, hata',* or *hatta'h*) is frequently translated to the theological term *sin*, and carries with it the meaning of "to fail" or "to miss" some desired thing, we should then ask: what are we missing when we *khata* (or sin), or what are we failing to do from a theological standpoint? Before proposing an answer, one more Hebrew word will be presented to provide greater clarity.

Torah. *Torah* is a Hebrew noun often translated or understood as *law*, but most Jews (or anyone familiar with the Hebrew language) will state "the commonly accepted "law" gives the wrong impression" (Rabinowitz & Harvey, 2007, p. 39) and instead means, more appropriately, *instruction* or *teaching* with the sense of pointing someone in the right direction. *Torah* derives from the root word *yarah,* which is a verb meaning "to throw" or shoot like an archer, such as in 1 Samuel 20:20, 26-27 where Jonathan is shooting arrows as a means of communicating with David. With that, consider the following synopsis:

> The Hebrew word, *torah* (תורה), is derived from a three-letter combination that was often used in the realm of archery, *yareh* (ירה). *Yareh* means to shoot an arrow in order to hit a mark. The mark or target, of course, was the object at which the archer was aiming. Consequently, *torah*, one of the nouns derived from this root, means to hit the target, or hit the mark. In time, the word torah evolved into referring to teaching or instruction, which hits the mark concerning truth. (Torah Resources International, n.d., para 1)

Given this understanding, it can be seen how *torah* and *khata* relate to one another, where the former can mean "hitting the mark," and the latter is often referred to as "missing the mark." Thus, to follow *torah* is to hit the mark—or fulfill the purpose of *torah*, which is love (or love of neighbor) according to Jewish tradition (Rabinowitz & Harvey, 2007)[45]—and *khata* (sin) is to miss that mark. With that, we have addressed the questions posed previously: what are we missing or failing to do when we *khata*, or sin? In short, we are missing the mark of *torah* by failing to follow *torah*, which means, in sum, we are failing to love. This concept is reflected in Christian theology as well:

> "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (*NRSVue*, 2022, Matthew 22:36-40)

Jesus, in concert with Jewish tradition (as a Torah-observant Jew), states that the sum purpose of the law (*torah*) is to love God and love people, and to fail to do so would miss the mark of *torah*, i.e., it would be sin (*khata*). In this regard we understand sin is not about "doing bad things" or

[45] This idea is contrary to the perception of many Christians who think Jews (on the whole) were or are focused on following the law by rote rather than understanding it as a collective command to love.

"breaking God's law" by rote, but rather failing to honor and love one another and God, which is the deeper meaning and purpose of the law (*torah*). However, the relationship between *khata* and *torah* can be deepened even further when considering the following:

> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (*NRSVue*, 2022, Matthew 5:17-20)

Jesus held *torah* in high regard and advocated for Torah observance as seen in the passage above (Blanton, 2013). Given that Jesus came to fulfill the Law and was the *telos*—the end goal—of the Law (see Rom. 10:4), he would not and did not advocate for one jot or tittle being erased from the very thing that pointed to him and that he would come to embody. Therefore, in a very real sense, Jesus subsumes *torah* into himself, goes beyond it (e.g., see Matt. 5-7), and becomes the *torah* we are to now follow, which Jesus concretizes when he states: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (*NRSVue*, 2022, John 14:6a), as well as his many exhortations to "follow me." With that, Jesus is now the mark we are to hit—we are to follow his commands and way of being in the world—and sin (*khata*) can now be understood as failing to hit that mark, i.e., when we fail to be (and become) like Jesus. In this regard sin continues to be a deeply relational concept because we are transformed and become like Jesus through being in relationship with Jesus, i.e., Jesus is our developmental *telos*, or the ontological goal of our development, and sin is the foil

for that relationship and subsequent development (or spiritual formation).

Conclusion: Sin is a Relational Breach

This chapter began by noting the centrality of the concept of sin in Western Christian thought and how theological structures can be and have been built around the concept of sin. Critical to our theology then becomes our understanding of sin, for that understanding will determine how it is addressed, i.e., what is the solution to the problem of sin in our lives and world? With that, we investigated the ways sin was conceptualized metaphorically in ancient times, e.g., sin as a stain or burden, and how it has been received and understood by Western Christians who presently and primarily comprehend sin through the metaphorical concepts of crime and debt. These metaphors have informed (and continue to inform) Western Christian theology, to include atonement theories, methods of evangelism, but also our response to and interaction with those who sin (i.e., humanity).

We then turned our attention to the various Hebrew (and corresponding Greek) words for sin, eschewing the previous metaphors so "the collective scope of meaning of sin" (Bashevkin, 2019, p. 5) could be revealed as represented in the biblical text. Through the process we discovered the deeply relational nature of sin that betrays the more superficial metaphors with which it has been associated. However, if, as Anderson (2009) claims, "metaphors are impossible to avoid" (p. 1), then I propose the following metaphor be employed: *sin is a relational breach*, to which I would add that the aberrant behavior we observe and label as sins—and they often are—are the signs and symptoms of relational breaches (or relational injuries). Building a theology around that understanding of sin gives opportunity for sin to be addressed in more restorative ways, e.g., through repairing relational breaches and facilitating the healing of relational wounds, over against the prevalent retributive and punitive methods seen in

much of Western Christian theology. Furthermore, it also informs—or must reform—our understanding of the "original" sin, as well as the conceptualization of original sin, to which we now turn.

Chapter 2: The Formulation of Original Sin

Throughout my development of thought on the topic of sin as it pertains to this dissertation, I have occasionally put my ideas out on the proverbial table to see how they would be received. I sat across from a friend at a local coffee shop one day and explained how I was critically assessing the doctrine of original sin and questioning whether the concept of original sin, i.e., the idea that humans have an inherited and inherently sinful nature, is a true and valid causation for the sin we see in the world and ourselves. After bantering back and forth on some of the details, my friend just looked perplexed and questioned why it ultimately mattered in the grand scheme of things, which drew an equally perplexed look from me. Perhaps I had not explained it well, so I made another attempt, but it only garnered the same response: "Why does it matter *why* we sin? We just do."

Perhaps it is the clinician in me (I am a physical therapist), but determining the cause of a problem—guided by the patient's history and presenting signs and symptoms—leads to a correct diagnosis and the employment of appropriate and effective treatments that facilitate physical healing and functional restoration. By extension, failing to correctly identify the cause of a problem leads to misdiagnoses and the employment of inappropriate or ineffective treatments that impede healing and perpetuate dysfunction, or, at worst, cause further harm to already ailing patients. So, when I consider the state of the world today and how it continues to be ravaged by the effects of sin, which are signs and symptoms, I have had to wonder if the way we understand sin (addressed in the previous chapter) and its causation, conceptualized as original sin, are correct. Our current understanding of sin and its causation, as well as our subsequent solutions, have not brought about the abatement of sin nor the facilitation of healing and restoration in individuals or collectives, and it seems it should. Given the deepening divisions and discord

within the U.S. at present, as well as much of the world (e.g., as I write Ukraine is being ravaged by war), we are clearly mired in perpetual dysfunction and far from healing, restoration, and, as Volf and Croasmun (2019) would add, living flourishing lives, which should be the chief end and purpose of our theology:

> We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The flourishing of human beings and all God's creatures in the presence of God is God's foremost concern for creation and should therefore be the central purpose of theology. (p. 11)

I agree. Efficacious theology should bring about human flourishing, which Volf and Croasmun (2019) define as "the good toward which humans are meant to strive. . . . We use the term more or less interchangeably with "true life," "good life," "life worth living," "human fullness," "life that truly is life," and more" (p. 13). Jesus might put it more succinctly as "living an abundant life in, through, and with me" (see John 10:7-10), which necessitates the reduction of sin and its deleterious effects, as well as the facilitation of healing and restoration. However, very little of that has been observed. Let us take a moment to assess this further.

In 2015, it was estimated the world population was 7.3 billion, and of that population an estimated 2.3 billion identified as Christian (Pew Research Center, 2017). Granted, "Christian" belief systems can vary greatly, but for the sake of argument it could be said nearly a third of the world population professed Jesus as Lord and Savior, which should presumably have some positive and redemptive effect in the world, e.g., by bringing about human flourishing and decreasing the presence and effects of sin. But given the state of the world it appears Christianity, i.e., Christian theology, does not produce such effects. However, the world is an enormous, complex, and dynamic mix of nations, tribes, languages, and cultures, and with less

than a third of the people therein professing Christ, it can be argued it is simply not enough (or too diverse) to effect significant change in regard to sin and/or human flourishing. Fair enough. Let us narrow the focus to something more manageable and consider just the United States.

The U.S. has a deeply religious foundational history, specifically Christian. Long before the American Revolution of the late 18th century a band of devout English Puritans crossed the Atlantic in the early 17th century to plant a "new and improved" England rooted in reformed religious ways—i.e., Calvinism (Bremer, 1995). While Puritanism and the New England Way eventually succumbed to the winds of change and effectively died, the first Great Awakening reignited religious fervor, and then (after the Revolution and establishment of the nation) the second Great Awakening saw the birth of many new expressions of Christianity that would wrestle for dominance and eventually feed into the fundamentalist and evangelical movements of the 20th century, all alongside the steadfast mainline Protestant and Catholic churches that had also established themselves this side of the pond (Sweeney, 2005). With that, the impact of all those predominantly Western streams of Christianity upon the populace and resultant culture in the U.S. over the course of its history cannot be denied. Therefore, it is not surprising to see in Pew Research Center's (2015) religious landscape study that just over 70% of the then estimated 245 million people in the U.S. identified as Christian (of varying traditions and denominations). Notably, that percentage represents a decline from 2007 estimations, where it was over 78%, and has continued to decline down to an estimated 65% in 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Furthermore, those figures were gathered *prior* to the divisive 2020 U.S. election cycle, the significant racial unrest of 2020 (and beyond), the U.S. Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, as well as our particular response to the (ongoing) COVID-19 global pandemic, i.e., before our signs and symptoms worsened. The point is, should not the previous (and current) majority

presence of professing Christians in the U.S. have mitigated against worsening dysfunction?

While it is understandable, but also arguable, that a third of the world population cannot effect much observable positive change on a global scale, why is it that a nation where much of its population professes to be Christian (especially in 2007)—and whose theology is fastidiously focused on the problem of sin—also cannot effect much positive change and has instead found itself in deeply divisive dire straits as of late? The U.S., per its religious history and majority religious identification as followers of Jesus, should be a leading example in not only loving God and loving people, but also in bringing about human flourishing through facilitating healing, restoration, and the abatement of sin; but instead, sin reigns—relational breaches and their consequences abound in all spheres of society. But how can this be the case in a nation full of Christians—some even making the bold claim we are a Christian nation? The clinician (and theologian) in me believes, in concert with Taylor (1945), that not only has our conception of sin been faulty, but also our understanding of its causation conceptualized as original sin.

That said, though, the concept of original sin as causation of sin is largely accepted as an unquestionable, self-evident truth in Western Christianity, and would not be considered faulty (nor easily replaced by another proposition). G. K. Chesterton (1908) stated as much in the early 20th century in response to those in London who were challenging the concept:

> Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin—a fact as practical as potatoes. . . . Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved. . . . [because human sin can be seen] in the street. (p. 22)

The presence of sin “in the street” is indeed a fact, but to question the concept of original sin is

not to deny the presence of sin or that humans sin, it is to question the *cause* of that sin. What Chesterton reveals (as many of my personal interlocutors also have) is that to challenge the idea of an inherently sinful nature is to somehow deny the existence, nature, or problem of sin itself, or, furthermore, that those who sin are not guilty of or responsible for their sin and its consequences. Let me reassure the reader, sin exists in the world because humans do sin and it is a significant problem that is grievous to God and all of humanity, so much so that we must clearly discern its causation so as to bring about its cessation; therefore, the question that remains is *why* we sin. While the presence of sin in our lives and world is fact, the notion that humans sin because we inherited an inherently sinful nature (encapsulated in the concept of original sin)—*is not* fact, it is a theory, contrary to the belief of Chesterton (1908) and many Western Christians. Furthermore, I contend it is a theory that has not served us well, has led to ineffective solutions for sin, healing, and restoration, and has, in many ways, perpetuated sin in our lives and world. Therefore, given our current theory for the causation of sin is inefficacious, it is reasonable to review and assess that theory for tenability, and then propose any reformulations that would serve to more accurately reflect the cause of sin, and furthermore, lead us to more effective solutions for the problem of sin and its deleterious effects in our lives and world.

There is a plethora of literature on the doctrine of original sin, and I refer the reader to comprehensive texts such as Couenhoven (2013), Madueme and Reeves (2014), Smith (1994), Smith (2019), Stump and Meister (2020), Toews (2013), and Wiley (2002) for a more detailed history of the doctrine's development, challenges, and proffered substantiation that will not be presented herein. Furthermore, the concept of original sin, along with its inherent problems and implications given its current reception, were all presented and discussed in the Introduction; therefore, this chapter will only serve to provide an overview of the conceptualization of original

sin and the Western stream of thought that shaped the formulation of the theory that became the doctrine of original sin.

The Origins of Original Sin

As stated in the Introduction, the doctrine of original sin is deeply embedded in Western Christianity, due in part to its longevity (having been established and accepted in the 5th century AD), as well as the celebrity of its chief developer, Augustine of Hippo, whose powerful influence cannot be overstated given his writings and teachings were (and are) foundational to the development of Western Christian thought, biblical exegesis, and theology. As a result, the doctrine "enjoyed virtual canonical status" (Madueme, 2020, p. 11) even though the term *original sin* cannot be found in the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. Much like the doctrine of the Trinity (a term also not found in Scripture), the doctrine of original sin was extrapolated from certain sections of the biblical text and formulated to fit a narrative—in this case a polemical narrative—that Augustine developed over time in reaction to specific controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, most notably Pelagianism (Olson & English, 2005).

To note, theological controversies were common and ensued from the time the last of the apostles died (around 100 AD). Olson and English (2005) explain this well:

> When they died . . . Christianity entered a new era for which it was not entirely prepared. It would no longer be possible to settle doctrinal disputes by turning to an apostle. The next generation was compelled to reflect on Jesus' and the apostles' teachings on their own, and thus theology began. (p. 9)

Therefore, much of what is considered orthodox theology was forged in the fires of controversy and hotly debated, and for the first few centuries it was also done without a formalized canon of Scripture to reference (Olson, 1999). Without the apostles and their teachings to rely upon, those

that came after had to fend for themselves, so to speak, against other theologies and philosophies that continually emerged and posed challenges to the truth of Jesus and his gospel message, e.g., protracted Gnosticism in all its forms (Olson, 1999; Smith, 1994). Given that context, developing a theology of sin, such as what Augustine later formulated, was not of immediate concern or consideration given it was not part of any early conversation or controversy. Smith (1994) further notes:

> The development of a full-blown theology of sin was slow in coming to the early church, for the writings of the apostolic fathers were not systematic but occasional. *And while they took it as a given that sin is universal, they made no concerted attempt to discover why* [emphasis added]. (p. 17)

My friend from the coffee shop thus sits in good company; the earliest Christian church fathers and theologians did not give priority to the question of why we sin, that is, until controversy arose and forced a theological response nearly 400 years after Jesus. With that, it interesting to consider that for a doctrine the West regards as central to Christianity, it seems it would have first emerged much earlier in time, i.e., closer to that of Jesus, and, furthermore, given its presupposed import, one would have expected Jesus to address the problem, nature, or causation of sin much more specifically and directly in his teachings, especially since he came to save us from it. Thus, it seems Jesus was not overtly concerned with the subject either since he did not provide any such declarations or salient insights,[46] which left early theologians and church fathers to theorize by drawing from an incomplete biblical witness, the writings of the apostolic fathers, apologists, and fellow church fathers, and also their own individual contexts, experiences, and developing church traditions.

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[46] If one does a search of the common Greek words used for sin, i.e., *hamartia, paraptoma, and anomia,* it will be seen Jesus mostly spoke about sin in terms of forgiveness, and not as an essential part of human nature or behavior.

Early Conceptions Toward Original Sin

Much of what is understood regarding the early church fathers' thoughts and theology on most matters must be gleaned from their writings, as most did not set out to write deeply or systematically about any particular issue, and their writings were often dialogues with others over theological or ecclesial matters, controversial or non (Olson, 1999; Smith 1994). Thus, each succeeding generation had to scour and *interpret* those writings to gain theological insights applicable to their own context and concerns. Therefore, in regard to the topic of sin, it appears from the writings of the early church fathers (up through the 4th century) that 1) most spoke of the universality of sin, and 2) Adam's transgression in the garden played a significant role in ushering sin and its consequence, death, into the world, but 3) sin was ultimately viewed as a matter of individual human free will and, again, there were no underlying questions being raised as to why someone would choose to sin (Smith, 1994).

However, within those early writings, certain concepts began to emerge that arguably built upon one another over the course of time that Augustine would eventually draw from during his development and defense of the doctrine of original sin (Augustine, 1957). For example, Greek Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons (120-202) put forth that all of humanity was “in Adam” (per Paul in 1 Cor. 15:22), but Irenaeus was using the concept to develop a deeper theology of redemption in Christ and not putting forth a theology of sin (Irenaeus, n.d.; Olson & English, 2005). Regardless, the idea of humanity being “in Adam” when he sinned resonated with many others thereafter, such as Irenaeus' younger Latin contemporary Tertullian of Carthage (150-212), who is credited with originating the Western interpretation of Genesis 3, thus becoming an influential voice in the developing theology of sin (Smith, 1994). Wiley (2002) summarizes Tertullian's position well:

> In the historical realm, Adam's sin caused the alienation of human beings from God. In nature itself, the first sin changed the human state from one of blessedness to one of moral wretchedness.[47] To explain the relation between Adam and his descendents [*sic*], Tertullian drew upon current theories in the ancient world of the origin of the soul. He favored the *traducianist theory* that the body and soul were generated together in sexual intercourse. He also argued that Adam and his descendents [*sic*] shared an original unity: "We are linked with Adam because all souls were first of all contained in his." This idea of an original unity of Adam and humankind is the emergence of a metaphysical or ontological principle of explanation for human solidarity in sin with Adam. (pp. 44-45)

That said, Tertullian did maintain, as with many other early church fathers, the "complete human freedom to choose good or evil" (Smith, 1994, p. 30), i.e., the human will was not utterly corrupted despite this inherited proclivity to sin. Furthermore, this proclivity to sin was not tantamount to inherent sin (as would be argued by Augustine later), evidenced by Tertullian's rejection of infant baptism that had become a practice in the early church (Wiley, 2002).

Baptism, which was performed in the 1st century to signify conversion and confession of Jesus as Lord, had somewhat morphed by the 3rd century into a sacramental rite that brought forgiveness of sin; therefore, if infants did not need to be baptized, they did not possess any sin from which to be washed clean (Wiley, 2002). Origen of Alexandria (185-254), though, did "[correlate] infant baptism with sin and explicitly named the sin 'original sin'" (Wiley, 2002, p. 46). But the caveat therein is Origen believed in the preexistence of souls and "posited a pre-cosmic Fall" (Smith, 1994, p. 24); therefore, all humans rebelled against God in their preexistent

[47] Notably, while this assertion has been made throughout the centuries (and in much of the literature), there is no further explanation as to *how* Adam's sin fundamentally changed his inherent nature from one of "blessedness" to "wretchedness," or from inherently good to inherently bad, wicked, or evil, it is just posited that it did. Furthermore, sinning is thus presented as having the same creative (or uncreative) power as God.

states and when receiving their bodies they were inherently sinful at conception and in need of forgiveness upon birth (Edwards, 2018), ergo, baptism.[48] However, the sin in each was their own preexistent sin and not part of Adam's "original" sin, so Origen's concept of original sin is not in concert with what Augustine would later develop (Wiley, 2002). Regardless, the term and concept of original sin was put forth.

Lastly, another few teachings that would inform Augustine's conceptualization of original sin came from Cyprian and Ambrose. Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (200-258) justified the growing church practice of infant baptism with a form of inherited guilt that must be washed away, which, again, would not be on par with Augustine's final formulation, but likely helped perpetuate the practice of infant baptism, as Toews' (2013) explains:

> Cyprian teaches a) that to be "carnally born" as a descendant of Adam involves participating in an hereditary infection by sin, and b) that the sin in question, which is forgiven ("remitted") by baptism, is not the new born's [*sic*] own, but the sin of another—that is, presumably, Adam's. (p. 66)

Bishop Ambrose of Milan (339-397) is the last theologian of significance before Augustine, being not only an older contemporary but also pivotal in Augustine's conversion to Christianity; therefore, he had significant influence on Augustine's theological development.

> Ambrose was the first of the Latin fathers to explicitly teach the doctrine of the "Original Righteousness" or "Perfection" of Adam. . . . This doctrine of "Original Righteousness" is important because it maximized the "Fall-theory" by presenting the original state of man as one of unqualified perfection and bliss over against which Adam's sin is presented as a much more serious and inexcusable offense. This strong contrast was

[48] Origen used Psalms 51:5 and 58:3 to substantiate the idea of children being "born into the world already stained with sin" (Smith, 1994, 24).

> reflected in the shift in language used to describe Adam's disobedience; the tendency was to speak of Adam's "sin" as "fall" (lapsus) rather than "transgression" (praevaricatio). . . Ambrose also introduced a quite new reason for the "fall": "Adam wanted to claim something which did not belong to him, that is, equality with the Creator." The root cause of Adam's "fall" now became the sin of "pride," to which Ambrosiaster, a contemporary of Ambrose, added that Adam wanted to become like God. (Toews, 2013, pp. 66-67)

Ambrose also carried forward and concretized the hereditary nature of sin with associated inherited guilt—linking it directly to Adam's sin—and made "numerous allusions and references to "original sin" as an inherited bias towards evil" (Toews, 2013, p. 67), thus putting forth the first iteration of original sin as it would come to be known in greater depth under Augustine. Ambrose also emphasized the shift in thinking from sin as being something one does to something one is—a state of being (Smith, 1994). One final note from Toews (2013) is worth mentioning:

> Two other themes in Ambrose should be noted. First, the divinely appointed remedy for the hereditary disease of sinful human nature is baptismal regeneration as administered by the church. Secondly, contrary to all expectation, but still in agreement with his Greek predecessors, Ambrose insisted on the importance of free will or human responsibility, a freedom that will be lost with his student, Augustine. (Toews, 2013, p. 68)

In summary, over the course of three centuries we can follow the stream of thought that developed and would carry Augustine along and become integrated into the final formulation of the doctrine of original sin: all of humanity was *in Adam* (literally) when he *fell due to pride*, thus wanting to become like God, which was the *original sin* that caused *alienation from God* and *changed our originally righteous and perfect state* of being to one of *inheritable moral*

corruption (with *inherited guilt*) that made all of humanity *naturally prone to sin*. However, our guilt could be washed away with the sacrament of baptism, and the proclivity to sin from our corrupt state of being could still be countered and controlled by our retained freedom to choose the good over the bad—which was a belief Augustine would effectively remove from the Western stream of thought.

Augustine and the Formulation of Doctrine

Aurelius Augustinus, better known as St. Augustine or Augustine of Hippo (354-430), was born to a Christian mother and a pagan father, and

> [a]lthough he was raised as a Christian, Augustine wandered away from practicing the faith as an adolescent and especially as a young student at the academy in Carthage, where he alternated between trying to "scratch the itching sore of lust" and attempting to discover the meaning of life through studying philosophy and religion. (Olson, 1999, p.257)

In his search for meaning and intellectual stimulation, Augustine was drawn in by Manichaeism, which "offered answers to life's ultimate questions that seemed to the young student superior to Christianity's or traditional paganism's answers" (Olson, 1999, p. 257), particularly in regard to the cause of evil in the world. Manichaeism posited an eternal battle between the equal forces of a spiritual good and a material evil that initially appealed to Augustine; however, as with Christianity, he eventually found Manichaeism lacking and resorted to living as a pagan in Milan (with a concubine and their son), and began studying Neo-Platonism (Olson, 1999; Toews, 2013). Over his course of study, Augustine gleaned new insight about the cause of evil that was in accord with what Cappadocian father Gregory of Nyssa taught: "evil is not a substance but the absence of the good" (Olson, 1999, p. 257). Furthermore, he eventually became convinced "there

could be an infinite spiritual reality that is not material" (Olson, 1999. p.257), which was a significant paradigm shift that, combined with coming under the influence of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (339-397) and his powerful rhetorical preaching, effectively changed Augustine's mind on Christianity as a viable worldview, thus leading him (at the age of 31) to his transformative conversion moment while reading Paul's letter to the Romans (Olson, 1999; Toews, 2013). Ambrose baptized Augustine into the Catholic Church in 387, and shortly thereafter Augustine returned home to establish a monastic community to study the Bible and Neo-Platonism, but a few years later in 391 while visiting Hippo "he was mobbed and forced to be ordained a priest. Five years later he was ordained as Bishop" (Toews, 1999, 73), which is not the most conventional route into formal ministry. Lastly, Augustine was not a scholar, did not know Greek or Hebrew, and even though he was a literal interpreter of Scripture, he relied upon poor Latin translations (and mistranslations; Smith, 1994; Toews, 2013).[49]

Therefore, it was this Augustine—a late convert with persistent lustful struggles, Neo-Platonic leanings, inadequate preparation and knowledge, and taken against his will into leadership in the stream of Western Christianity—that entered into debate with his former Manicheans, the Donatists, and the Pelagians over the course of his tenure as Bishop; yet through these controversies his theology would be shaped and changed—sometimes to the point of

[49] Augustine's most notable literal interpretation of a poor Latin translation that informed his conceptualization of original sin (specifically its heritability) was that of Romans 5:12. Hart's (2015) assessment is worth mentioning: "Augustine's magisterial reading of the Letter to the Romans, as unfolded in reams of his writings, and ever thereafter by his theological heirs [is] perhaps the most sublime "strong mis-reading" in the history of Christian thought...the notoriously misleading Latin rendering of Romans 5:12 that deceived Augustine into imagining Paul believed all human beings to have, in some mysterious manner, sinned "in" Adam, which obliged Augustine to think of original sin—bondage to death, mental and moral debility, estrangement from God—ever more insistently in terms of an inherited guilt (a concept as logically coherent as that of a square circle), and which prompted him to assert with such sinewy vigor the justly eternal torment of babes who died unbaptized" (p. 72).

apparent contradiction[50]—but would eventually mature into a systematized theology unlike anyone who came before (Olson 1999; Smith, 1994; Toews, 2013).[51] It is to that distilled and mature Augustinian formulation of the doctrine of original sin that we now turn.

The Controversial Forging of the Doctrine of Original Sin

The impetus for honing Augustine's concept of original sin came through the Pelagian controversy. Olson and English (2005) offer a good summary of the controversy's backstory:

> From his own conversion on, Augustine tended to place great emphasis on the grace and power of God in salvation. It seemed to him that God's action in his own experience of conversion was so overwhelming that he could not really resist it.[52] He did not choose God; God chose him. He believed that this impression was confirmed by the apostle Paul's teaching in passages such as Romans 9–11. In the Confessions he praised and thanked God for sovereignly changing him; Augustine gave all the glory to God and conversely acknowledged his own helplessness to do anything good: "My whole hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will. You require continence. A certain writer has said (Wisd. 8:21): 'As I knew that no one can be continent except God grants it, and this very thing is part of wisdom, to know whose gift this is.'"

When the British monk Pelagius (d. 420) arrived in Rome sometime around 405,

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[50] Such as his "strong endorsement of human free will in his polemic against the Manichaeans" (Olson, 1999, p. 264), but in debating Pelagius he came to posit the Fall utterly corrupted the will (the doctrine of human depravity), and humanity could not *not* sin (Olson, 1999).

[51] Systematic thought is a very Western ideal and likely part of Augustine's continued reception and appeal. In Augustine's striving to fit every theological piece into place in his doctrine, it is no wonder he is considered by some the first "modern" man, even though he lived in the watershed of Classical Antiquity and Medieval ages.

[52] This concept of divine providence became central in Augustine's theology (and argumentation), thus removing the concept of free will, which was then carried on through the Reformers and with the Reformed, particularly with John Calvin and Calvinism: "A central distinctive of Reformed theology is that God exercises meticulous providence in the universe so that no event occurs, and no object exists, without God's particular decree" (Maxwell, 2021, pp. 1-2).

> he noticed that many Christians were living morally indecent lives, while many others seemed unconcerned about this growing indifference to moral purity and obedience in the church. He began inquiring about the possible causes of this, and when he heard or read Augustine's prayer quoted above, he was horrified and immediately sure that this was the root cause of the problem. If Christians became convinced that they could not be continent (to abstain from immorality) unless God gave them that gift, then it should not surprise anyone if they practiced incontinence. That was Pelagius's argument. Pelagius then composed *On Nature*, a book that condemned Augustine's view and argued that humans can live sinless lives through their "natural endowments" and are responsible to do so. This was the catalyst that set off a great controversy over original sin, free will and grace that consumed the Western Church off and on for over a hundred years and echoes down through the subsequent centuries. (pp. 51-52)

As mentioned previously, the reader can refer to the abundance of texts and research done on this topic to understand the myriad details of the controversy, how it took shape, and how it honed and synthesized Augustine's conception of original sin, as well as the finer points of what informed Augustine's thoughts and rationale, e.g., his own persistent struggles with lust (i.e., concupiscence) that felt uncontrollable and for which he carried significant guilt (Smith, 1994). For the purposes of discussion, we will only focus on the final outcome of the controversy.

To condemn Pelagius (and Pelagianism), Augustine drew from the Western stream of theology he inherited, and expanded, refined, or refuted certain concepts to counter and sufficiently denounce Pelagius' claims, which were, chiefly, his rejection of original sin and inherited guilt (so infants are not born with an inherent sinful nature nor guilty for Adam's sin), and that humans were indeed capable of freely choosing to obey God and not sin because human

nature was essentially good as created by God and Adam's sin did not change that nature (Olson, 1999; Wiley, 2002).[53] "In response to Pelagius's perceived teachings about sin, free will, and grace, Augustine developed his own strong theology of human depravity and God's sovereignty and grace" (Olson, 1999, p. 270), i.e., Augustine doubled down. Regarding human depravity, it was total; Adam's sin infected and incapacitated all of human nature (will and mind) so that humans are unable to do good and, therefore, are unable to not sin (Smith, 1994). Regarding inherited guilt: "All humanity is stained and guilty, and thus must bear punishment . . . even unbaptized infants are condemned to hell because of their guilt that they have inherited from Adam" (Smith, 1994). Furthermore, although baptism did remove this guilt, the depraved human nature remains (recall "snow-covered dung"), and any possible good humans do is only a result of God's intervening grace, and not by the choice or cooperation of humans whose desire is always and only to sin (Olson, 1999).[54] In sum, Augustine persuasively argued that humanity is hopelessly and radically corrupt, inherently bad and sinful at its core, guilty before God before one breath is taken and deserving of punishment, and even though being baptized into Christ washes away the guilt, the depraved nature remains and, thus, remains in control save for the intervening grace of God.[55]

In the end, Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy and Augustine's concept of original sin (despite ongoing opposition over time) was affirmed as official Catholic church doctrine at the Councils of Carthage (411-418) and Orange (529) and reaffirmed at the Council of Trent in

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[53] Humans free will to choose was not a denial of the need for grace, as Augustine would claim. "For Pelagius, God's primary gift of grace is moral nature itself (*bonum naturae*)." The image of God in human beings is this capacity for moral choice and performance. Choosing and doing the good do not require a further gift of divine assistance" (Wiley, 2002, p. 68).

[54] This speaks to Augustine's monergism (God alone controls and directs all things through his power and grace), which strongly opposes synergism (God and humans in a cooperative relationship, i.e., God's grace with human choice).

[55] One wonders still, why God's grace does not prevail more and sin still reigns.

1536, around which time the Reformers (e.g., Martin Luther and John Calvin) also embraced the doctrine—and "reformed" it, as discussed in the Introduction—which then became a part of numerous Protestant confessions of faith, and continues to be found in some form in present-day denominational statements of belief worldwide (Smith, 1994; Stump & Meister, 2020; Wiley, 2002). However, such statements today usually truncate and soften the language to simply state humans have a "sinful nature," seemingly ignorant of (or perhaps attempting to divorce it from) its controversial developmental and theoretical history, as well as the considerably negative anthropology that derives from it and condemns all of humanity as hopelessly depraved, guilty, and deserving of death (i.e., hell). Therefore, believing "Jesus saves" becomes little more than saving us from hell as nothing in us can truly change, so our only hope is in escaping future eternal punishment while leaving us in the present to contend with the consequences of sins we and others commit. While none of this is truly encouraging or personally transformative, it is continually promoted as "the best explanation of the evil that surrounds us" (Couenhoven, 2013, p. 5) and "without a doctrine of original sin, we lack insight into the plight and proper cure of evildoers" (Couenhoven, 2013, p. 9). With that estimation, the best available option as an answer to the question of why humans sin is: "because we have a sinful nature."

The Doctrinal Impact on Non-Believers

While the doctrine of original sin is a theological construct within Western Christianity that directly impacts Christians, it should not be assumed it only matters to and impacts believers. Historian Tom Holland's (2019) *Dominion* is an epic portrayal of the deep impact and influence of Christianity on the development of Western civilization; therefore, even if people do not identify as Christian or believe any of its tenets, they have still been influenced and/or formed by Christian beliefs systems, and particularly their central doctrines regarding sin.

Another historian, James Boyce (2015), took a similar approach to Holland but narrowed his focus specifically to the impact of the doctrine of original sin on Western civilization. Consider the following comments:

> Original sin makes so little rational or ethical sense that it is not surprising that even the churches now prefer to pretend that the West's Christian inheritance is centred on good behaviour rather than inescapable corruption. But the doctrine is much more than the idiosyncratic teaching of a bygone age. In 1934 Carl Jung observed: 'Christianity is our world … Our whole science, everything that passes through our head, has inevitably gone through this history.' Jung exaggerated in claiming that 'the age of rational enlightenment has eradicated nothing', but he was right to be frustrated at the assumption that the influence of Christian ideas concluded when people rejected the Christian religion. *This influence is most obvious in the distinctive discontent of modern people – the feelings of guilt and inadequacy associated not with doing wrong but with being wrong. This angst is as evident in the anxieties of contemporary consumers as it was among ancient believers* [emphasis added]. (Boyce, 2015, pp. 11-12)

The central concept of the doctrine of original sin—that we are inherently bad, perverse, wicked, or evil—is steeped into Western culture; therefore, people either explicitly believe it because they were taught it, or they implicitly believe it as evidenced by their sense of "being wrong" because it was a message received and internalized into Western culture for centuries. Some may argue this internal sense of wrongness comes from "the fact" of sin and having a sinful nature; therefore, it serves to only substantiate Augustine's conclusions and doctrine. Fair enough. But consider what might be if the Pelagians' arguments had won out and Augustinianism had been declared heresy instead. What if Western Christians had been taught and promoted the (biblically

supported) concept of humanity's inherent goodness, even though they sin? What would the world—or at least the Western world—look like today had that been the narrative?

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, failing to correctly identify the cause of a problem can ultimately serve to perpetuate the problem, create more problems, and/or cause harm, and such appears to be the case when it comes to the doctrine of original sin. For centuries the concept of original sin has been the best available option for understanding why people sin; however, as stated in the Introduction and recalled herein, it is inherently problematic. The implications of internalizing the anthropology derived from the concept of original sin are vastly negative (e.g., it promotes the dehumanization of self and others, and sabotages transformation). The doctrine also serves to restrict the gospel—the solution to sin—to only that of Jesus dying for our sin and taking the punishment we deserved (according to the doctrine's paradigm), while offering little else for personal transformation. Furthermore, the doctrine reinforces retributive justice and the "sin as crime" metaphor, which do not promote or bring about relational restoration. Therefore, with the doctrine seemingly perpetuating the problem it claims to address, failing to facilitate transformation, restoration, and human flourishing, and instead potentially causing further harm or dysfunction, it is reasonable to reassess the doctrine and reformulate it as necessary.

This overview of the doctrine's development over centuries and its final expression given by Augustine demonstrates the very human element that played a role and brought justifiable challenges to the doctrine and central concept of original sin. It also shows how the doctrine was only theoretical in nature, especially when considering the metaphysical conceptualization of how sin fundamentally changed human nature without further explanation. Thus, theology, and the doctrines therein, are not inerrant or infallible (and sometimes not divinely inspired), even

when they derive apparent support from certain sections of Scripture. Therefore, we must continually assess our theology and doctrines to ensure they are in line with the overarching theme of restoration in the biblical narrative, are reflective of Jesus' ministry, mission and gospel message, and promote human transformation and flourishing even in the midst of hostile environments. In short, our theology needs to be life-giving and not death-dealing, and, I believe, the doctrine of original sin leans to the latter, even though it appears to provide an answer to the problem and presence of sin.

As has often been the case in the history of healthcare, a problem (e.g., disease or dysfunction) can be identified and attempts made to address it, while its true etiology remains unknown or misunderstood. We can only adequately address a problem to the extent that the cause of the problem is elucidated and made known; however, it is still wise and important to attempt whatever solution we can with the understanding and knowledge at hand. But as time passes and more understanding and knowledge is attained, we respond accordingly by updating and reformulating our solutions, which sometimes means rendering previous protocols obsolete, or admitting that they were ineffective (or perhaps even harmful). I argue this is the case for the doctrine of original sin, which served a purpose in its time, but is no longer tenable and is potentially harmful. Thus, a reformulation is necessary, specifically as it pertains to the efficient cause of sin, i.e., why do humans sin? In light of recent developments in the fields of psychology and its associated neurology, the remainder of this dissertation will build an argument for trauma as an efficient cause of the sin we experience within ourselves and the world.

Chapter 3: Understanding Trauma

In this chapter we switch from the theological to the psychological and physiological realm of trauma. Thus far we have seen the concept of sin has a history, as does original sin, and so, too, does trauma. One of the points to be grasped during these presentations is to realize these concepts were not and are not concretized, but instead highly influenced by such things as time, place, culture, circumstances (of the individual and collective), sociopolitical movements, progressive revelation, discovery, and the general advancement of knowledge; therefore, each concept has been reinterpreted or reframed accordingly as they have been received throughout the generations (and they will continue to be so). However, in our respective *Sitz im Leben* we tend to place concepts in a box and claim "this is it; this is the truth of it, this is how it is," yet given time deconstruction happens as our boxed interpretations, definitions, and understanding can no longer hold the reality we are living. But what is important to retain, so as to not promote relativism or be accused of some form of progressivism, is that essential truths of the concepts discussed herein have always been there—and will continue to be there—but we can now see them more broadly, deeply or clearly than before. Sin has always been about a relational breach between God and humanity, and humanity with itself, even as we placed more emphasis on its legal or juridical elements. The doctrine of original sin has always been about acknowledging and addressing the very real problem of sin in the world, how much pain and death it brings to humanity, and how grievous it is to God, even as we placed ultimate causation and explanation on a singular interpretation of the Fall narrative that is largely untenable within our current epistemological milieu. And trauma, as we will see, has always been present from time immemorial even as it has gone unnamed, unrecognized (as we understand it today), and largely unaddressed—and often suppressed—though its effects have passed along unabated through the

generations with compounding interest. But healing comes through revealing, and such is the purpose herein.

The Progressive Revelation of Trauma

Yochai Ataria (2017), an Israeli senior lecturer and researcher in psychology, trauma, and culture, makes a bold suggestion "that the very notion of culture emerges from trauma" (p. xv); in sum, trauma and culture are reciprocating agents that are effectively bringing down humanity, yet, ironically, as Ataria (2017) further claims, trauma is also what forms us and thus holds us together. This might seem hyperbolic and paradoxical, but we are prone to not see the water in which we swim. Many people do not see the pervasive trauma all around them, do not recognize it in their own selves and how formative it is (and was), do not realize the culture is built upon and around trauma (including ways to deny, numb, or escape it), do not see how it gets passed along daily, interpersonally, and generationally, and do not see its dysfunctional and destructive manifestations in the culture or its people (Ataria, 2017; Bonds & Craps, 2020). In short, for those that have eyes to see and ears to hear, our history—our formative history—is a history of trauma; or as van der Kolk and McFarlane (1996) starkly put it: "Experiencing trauma is an essential part of being human; history is written in blood" (p. 3). While certainly true—evidenced even by the most recent 20th century being one of bloodiest on record—blood need not be shed for trauma to occur, which is a reality that has taken centuries to acknowledge, and with it came a significant pendulum swing.

In the 21st century Western context from which I write, *trauma* and its derivatives (e.g., *traumatization* or *traumatized*) have become ubiquitous in our vernacular, and with it a presupposition of implicit understanding (much like *sin* discussed previously). "Yet, for all its ubiquity, the definition of trauma remains unstable. The transition from professional to popular

discourse has arguably led to a loss of specificity in its meaning and application" (Bonds & Craps, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, *trauma* is found used in a variety of contexts from the serious to the humorous, the egregious to the unpleasant, and from violent death to mere disappointment. Furthermore, it is used to describe an act, event, or aftereffects. As Erickson (1991) put it three decades ago: "the term has been drifting somewhat ambiguously along the axis that reaches from the precipitating event at one end to the injury or disorder at the other" (p. 456), and we are still vacillating between those extremes, if not more so, as trauma has drawn increasing interest and analysis from multiple professional and academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, neurology, sociology, and the humanities) that aid in plumbing its depths and fueling its expansion of meaning, all of which brings it a far cry from its original medico-surgical definition as that of a physical injury (Bonds & Craps, 2020). This expansion and diversity of meaning is evidenced when referencing its current definition in the dictionary; the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) online entry is as follows:

> Full Definition of *trauma* [noun]
>
> 1a: an injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent
>
> b: a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury
>
> c: an emotional upset, [e.g.,] the personal trauma of an executive who is not living up to his own expectations—Karen W. Arenson
>
> 2: an agent, force, or mechanism that causes trauma

In regard to this progressive expansion of meaning, Bonds and Craps (2020) state

> the definition of trauma has paradoxically become both more and less specific. The intense scrutiny to which trauma has been subjected has allowed it to be more clearly

> defined in clinical terms. *However, as it has gained cultural currency in vernacular parlance, the notion of trauma has been emptied of much of its meaning and indiscriminately applied to a seemingly limitless range of experiences* [emphasis added]. (p. 43)

To problematize it further, Bonds and Craps (2020) also note that trauma—and herein trauma is referred to within the psychological domain unless otherwise indicated—has become so central to identity and belonging it can be argued "we are living in a trauma culture" (p. 4), and not necessarily because we experience more trauma (although we certainly have as of late), but rather "we have found new ways to categorize, represent, and exploit distressing experiences. Today, trauma is big business" (p. 3), and as a result trauma "is contested [in] its rhetoric, its origins, its symptoms, and its treatment" (p. 5). These realities are troublesome as they feed into a perpetual misunderstanding of trauma and its implications for individuals, communities, and cultures, as well as drive a sense of illegitimacy when trauma is cited as a possible—and as will be argued, a probable—causation of symptoms, whether in an individual or a collective (e.g., family, church community, or nation). Furthermore, such realities confound efforts to adequately address trauma, which is problematic not only for the traumatized but also for those desiring to help.[56] With that, while the ubiquity of verbiage should seemingly be helpful to raise awareness of trauma and promote effective interventions—and it has to some degree—it has simultaneously confounded efforts to bring about a more compassionate, trauma-aware, and trauma-informed

[56] As a case in point, I was recently introduced to a 12-week packaged program with an implicit guarantee that group participants *will* overcome their trauma. This feeds into the Western consumer mindset and quick-fix mentality that will more often than not fail given the complex nature of trauma and equally complex treatment strategies that must be individually based. Participating in such a program *may* be helpful to some—as attested to by program participants in the marketing materials—but may also be more harmful than helpful to many others when 1) the program fails to "cure", and/or 2) ends up opening up a proverbial Pandora's box of associated traumatic experiences/memories that must also be addressed, which such packaged programs—and their often uneducated and inexperienced group leaders—are not prepared to address for what will likely be a long-term investment in healing.

society that is invested in curbing and reversing its effects and prevalence. Put another way, *trauma* has evolved and devolved; it went from relative non-existence to that of limited scope and causation to a ubiquity that effectively obliviates meaning, which has served to keep it from being fully acknowledged, validated, addressed, and healed.

Acknowledging Trauma: A Pertinent Historical Overview

Trauma is from the transliteration of the Greek noun τραῦμα (*trávma*), which points to its ancient roots and use. "In antiquity, the semantic field of τραῦμα (τρώμα; lat.: *vulnus*) and its derivatives is well attested. . . . [and] primarily denote physical kinds of wounds and wounding" (Becker, 2014, p. 17). Becker (2014) notes their use in the Septuagint,[57] as well as the New Testament, yet only with—and quite fittingly—the physician, Luke (see Luke 10:34),[58] who "conceives of trauma first and foremost in terms of physical wounding. However, in Acts 19:16, he speaks of a wounding which was caused by a demon (τό πνεῦμα τό πονηρός [the evil spirit]); here, the borderline between physical or somatic and psychic kinds of wounding is evidently crossed" (pp. 17-18). This latter postulation is arguable in that it was a man possessed with an evil spirit that inflicted physical trauma on others rather than a clear indication that the evil spirit had traumatized the man it possessed, i.e., inflicted psychic trauma on him. However, Becker's (2014) postulation lends itself to the concept of psychic (or psychological) trauma that had already existed prior to the 1st century AD:

> A combining of somatic and psychic dimensions can be observed in the Hellenistic world, beyond LXX-writings . . . Trauma studies thus take their natural point of departure from the ancient world.

[57] For example, see Gen. 4:23; Ex. 21:25; Job 9:17; and Isa. 1:6, where *trauma* is used in place of the Hebrew noun *petsa*, also meaning *wound.*

[58] Luke speaks of the Samaritan binding the physical wounds, i.e., τραυματα (*traumata*), of the man stripped, beaten, and left for dead by robbers.

> Thus, we can by no means claim that it is only the *modern* pathological usage of 'trauma' and 'traumatization' in psychiatry and psychology that is oriented towards an inner wounding. Ancient authors were already making use of this terminology in various, partly metaphorical ways. (p. 18)

One such author was Homer, whose ancient (8th century BC) Greek epic, *Iliad,* "created credible descriptions of combat stress-reactions in Achilles . . . which would now be recognized as posttraumatic stress" (Turnbull, 1998, p. 87). Other representations of trauma are then found in world literature across the ages, most notably in Shakespeare's works, e.g., "Henry IV appears to meet many, if not all, of the diagnostic criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder" (Friedman, n.d., para. 1).

Despite this ancient awareness and widespread literary representation, trauma studies, and with it, trauma theory,[59] would not gain any significant attention or traction until quite recently in the late 19th century, and the path to recognizing and validating psychological trauma since has been difficult, with several starts and stops along the way (Valent, 2012). Judith Herman (2015), in her groundbreaking text, *Trauma and Recovery*, notes:

> The study of psychological trauma has a curious history—one of episodic amnesia. Periods of active investigation have alternated with periods of oblivion. Repeatedly in the past century, similar lines of inquiry have been taken up and abruptly abandoned, only to be rediscovered much later. Classic documents of fifty or one hundred years ago often read like contemporary works. Though the field has in fact an abundant and rich tradition, it has been periodically forgotten and must be periodically reclaimed.
>
> This intermittent amnesia is not the result of the ordinary changes in fashion that

[59] To be clear, trauma studies and trauma theory focus on psychological trauma, not simply physical trauma.

> affect any intellectual pursuit. The study of psychological trauma does not languish for lack of interest. Rather, *the subject provokes such intense controversy that it periodically becomes anathema. The study of psychological trauma has repeatedly led into realms of the unthinkable and foundered on fundamental questions of belief* [emphasis added]. (p. 7)

Indeed, we will find this to be true, and it is a history worth continuing to explore as it bears similarities to the current cultural milieu in the West (especially the U.S.), and the barriers to progress we continue to face in becoming more trauma-aware and trauma-informed in our practices, policies, and, most pertinent to the discussion herein, our theology.

19th Century: Railway Spine, Traumatic Neurosis, and Hysteria

Most literature tracing the history of trauma studies places its emergence in the mid to late 19th century, dovetailing off the Industrial Revolution, with the published work (in 1866) of John Eric Erichsen (1818-1896), a London surgeon who observed in survivors of railway accidents—alongside the obvious fractures and soft tissue trauma—what he termed "railway spine . . . mostly unlocalized symptoms such as tiredness, dizziness, headaches, faulty sensual impressions, fear and pain. In his opinion, these symptoms were caused by concussions of the spine" (Metzger, 2014, p. 47). Notably, at the time this was *not* considered psychological trauma and was believed to be entirely somatic in origin even though a physical locus or material causation could not be identified (i.e., "unlocalized"), yet it is significant in the development of trauma studies because "the history of trauma concepts in modern medicine is always closely bound to somatic causation theories" (Metzger, 2014, p. 47).[60]

[60] This is notable in that the psychological (or immaterial) would be found to impact the physical body, yet from a dualistic understanding. Today the human is better understood as holistic (monism) and thus trauma is *embodied*. Therefore, a "somatic" cause remains viable—albeit from a different frame of thought than in the 19th century—in that every cell in our body is present and involved in a traumatic event, regardless if physical injury occurs, and it is

Towards Herman's point cited above, Erichsen's work meant that railway companies were held accountable and had to compensate for injuries sustained in accidents, including those that could not be physically localized yet were nonetheless longstanding and, therefore, potentially fabricated by those seeking financial gain, thus leading to court cases with physicians being called on as expert witnesses to validate or deny the alleged injuries (Metzger, 2014). With corporate money and insurance company payouts on the line, the veracity of such unseen, unlocalized yet long-term injuries was heavily scrutinized, fueling the need for further understanding and research. With that, German neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (1857-1919) would be the next significant contributor in trauma studies, having made the same observations as Erichsen did decades earlier, but considerably expanding the list of unlocalized symptoms to include "[s]pasms, uncontrollable tremors, temporary palsy and paralysis of the legs, fainting, sexual dysfunction, sleep disorders, stammering—the symptoms described are numerous" (Metzger, 2014, p. 47). Having eschewed railway spine (given the advancement of medical knowledge), Oppenheim proffered "the syndrome 'traumatic neuroses.' 'Neurosis' was a general term for any neurological illness which could not yet be localized in the body of the sufferer" (Metzger, 2014, pp. 47-48), yet this was still not psychologically linked as the German medical community of that generation remained convinced symptomatic causes would eventually, given time, be identified and precisely located within a specific body part, and consonant with that, Oppenheim tentatively put forth dysfunction within the cerebral cortex as possible causation for the neurosis (Metzger, 2014). However, along with that physical locus, Oppenheim also "allowed for shock and agitation, the so-called 'mental factor,' being partly responsible for the ailment—if not as single cause, then as a catalyst for the fully-fledged neurosis he describes"

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the body's response to external stimuli reminiscent of the original traumatizing event that elicits simultaneous physiological and psychological responses post-traumatically.

(Metzger, 2014, p. 48). To restate, Oppenheim was postulating that physical symptoms (e.g., the tremors, sexual dysfunction, or sleep disorders) were somatic manifestations of the "mental factor," which did not sit well with his colleagues.

> Oppenheim was soon entangled in fierce disputes with colleagues who refuted the concept of traumatic neurosis on exactly these grounds: the experience of shock and intense fear in railway and other accidents could not be responsible for the resulting neurosis—because how could it be explained that only some accident survivors develop symptoms while others stay perfectly healthy? (Metzger, 2014, p. 48)

Aside from not falling under the German standards of the somatic causation paradigm of the day, Oppenheim was unable to differentiate true sufferers of traumatic neurosis from those faking it for financial gain—which was a boon for railway and insurance companies—and thus "after some intense refutations, traumatic neurosis was excluded from professional discourse and no longer mentioned in neurological and psychiatric journals" (Metzger, 2014, pp. 48-49). Oppenheim would try again to promote traumatic neurosis when World War I produced similar symptoms in soldiers, but "[just] as 25 years before—and on much the same grounds—his concept was refuted. This ultimately led to the German post-war legislation that sufferers from shell shock had no claim to an invalid's pension" (Metzger, 2014, p. 49). The idea of traumatic neurosis was, indeed, "anathema" and had "foundered on fundamental questions of belief," assuredly aided by those with financial and political interests in the very things (e.g., industrialization and war) that were causing the neuroses in the afflicted.

A contemporary of Erichsen and Oppenheim in Paris was also laying down steppingstones along the path toward the realization of psychological trauma in conjunction with (and apart from) physical trauma or somatic cause. French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot

(1825-1893) did pioneering work with hysteria, a disorder of unknown origin present from ancient times yet mainly attributed to women who displayed similar unlocalizable symptoms to those mentioned previously with traumatic neurosis (Herman, 2015; Metzger, 2014).[61] However, in the closing decades of the 19th century, Charcot

> not only described hysteria in men for the first time . . . but also *proved* by means of hypnosis that ideas alone, immaterial ideas, could lead to somatic symptoms in hysterical persons. Under hypnosis, he told the test subject to display a certain symptom after being woken up—and once brought back from hypnosis, the patient displayed the specific bodily symptom without remembering why. By these means, Charcot convinced his audience that experiences, non-somatic psychological occurrences, could play a part in shaping the symptoms of hysteria. (Metzger, 2014, p. 50).

However, Charcot believed this hypnotic effect only worked with those presently afflicted or somehow predisposed to developing hysteria, therefore, in his opinion, it did not apply to the general population, and thus psychological trauma would remain an undeveloped concept until those following and building upon Charcot's work—notably Pierre Janet (1859-1947), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his colleague, Josef Breuer (1842-1925) in the 1890s—would begin to make some important discoveries (Herman, 2015; Metzger, 2014).

Austrians Freud, a neurologist, and Breuer, a physician, utilized Charcot's hypnotic techniques and found connections in their hysteria patients between present symptoms and past traumatic experiences, which were "not only shocks from occurrences such as railway accidents, *but in most cases intense emotional disturbances like an engagement broken by the groom-to-be,*

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61 *Hysteria* derives from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning womb, and the causation for observed symptoms in women was believed to arise from the uterus. This Greek derivation and explanation also point to the ancient origins and presence of hysteria.

the death of a loved one or sexual abuse [emphasis added]" (Metzger, 2014, pp. 50-51). To note, these discoveries occurred *prior* to the fully realized concept of the unconscious and Freud's extensive work in that area, and they also maintained that hypnosis (and one's susceptibility to it) was integral to these findings, but from which they also found a cure:

> by moving the traumatic memory from the hypnotic past to the awake part, thereby retroactively working through all the 'normal' emotions attached to the traumatic experience, the physician could cause the symptom to disappear.[62]
>
> Freud and Breuer pushed these mechanisms into the center of hysteria depiction—most cases of hysteria were caused by traumatic experiences or traumatic thoughts. Here, at last, we have arrived at the notion of a purely psychological trauma producing severe somatic and behavioral symptoms in the sufferer. (Metzger, 2014, p. 51)

French physician and psychologist Pierre Janet would also come to these same conclusions working independently, thus strengthening and enlarging the body of research into the association of psychological trauma and somatic symptoms, to include their alleviation "when the traumatic memories, as well as the intense feelings that accompanied them, were recovered and put into words. This method of treatment became the basis of modern psychotherapy" (Herman, 2015, p. 12). But lest we think the struggle to acknowledge and subsequently heal psychological trauma was over with these significant discoveries and advances in understanding, it was not to last, most notably because of the vast social implications drawn from the research.

Recall that Freud and Breuer had linked psychological trauma to past sexual abuse

[62] This is very akin to what occurs in eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. Reprocessing previously unprocessed memories with their associated emotions and negative cognitions helps integrate them in a healthy way into the person's life and removes their activating power and associated symptoms.

(among other things). In Freud's early work with hysteria, he came to delve deeply into women's sexual lives and "[w]hat he heard was appalling. Repeatedly his patients told him of sexual assault, abuse, and incest" (Herman, 2015, p. 13), so much so he concluded (and published in 1896) that prepubescent sexual experiences were the cause of hysteria and its persistence in sufferers over time. However, Freud would soon change his mind and attitude towards his own proclamation:

> Within a year, Freud had privately repudiated the traumatic theory of the origins of hysteria. His correspondence makes clear that he was increasingly troubled by the radical social implications of his hypothesis. Hysteria was so common among women that if his patients' stories were true, and if his theory were correct, *he would be forced to conclude that what he called "perverted acts against children" were endemic* [emphasis added], not only among the proletariat of Paris, where he had first studied hysteria, but also among the respectable bourgeois families of Vienna, where he had established his practice. This idea was simply unacceptable. It was beyond credibility. (Herman, 2015, pp. 13-14)

Indeed, it was "anathema" and had "led into realms of the unthinkable"; it simply could not be because the cost—if true—would be too high a social price to pay for all involved. Childhood sexual abuse had been well documented in France since the mid-19th century but considered done mostly by household servants (and preying on boys), but "Freud and Breuer introduced other attackers: fathers, brothers, other close family members, [and] husbands" (Metzger, 2014, p. 52; van der Kolk et al., 1996). The implications of such a reality were simply too much to bear and, not surprisingly, Freud's publication was not well received by his colleagues nor the surrounding patriarchal and bourgeois culture (Herman, 2015). With that, over the next decade—

and for reasons and pressures ultimately known only to him—Freud came to fully recant and completely change his posture and attitude towards afflicted women by denying their reality, claiming their accounts of childhood sexual abuse were false, and instead postulating such accounts were merely fantasies and/or fulfillments of unconscious and repressed sexual desires, with the latter becoming a central tenet of Freud's well-received psychoanalytic theory that would dominate the Western mindset throughout the 20th century (Herman, 2014; Metzger, 2015). As for the study of psychological trauma,[63] it came to a halt under these circumstances, the power of which was too much to overcome at the time so that even Janet, "who never abandoned his traumatic theory of hysteria and who never retreated from his hysterical patients, lived to see his works forgotten and his ideas neglected" (Herman, 2015, p. 18).

Before continuing with our historical overview, we must pause to not miss the import of this Freudian shift, so to speak. The sexual exploitation of women and children shifted from being a significant cause of psychological trauma (with sufficient research to support such a claim), to one of unconscious sexual desire—i.e., women and children unconsciously desired these exploitive sexual encounters. At this moment in history there was opportunity to move into a healing and restorative direction by exposing this cultural underbelly of endemic sexual abuse, but instead such exploitation was buried (or outright denied) despite the research, and any future complaints from women and children would come under suspicion given the power of Freud's shift in theory. Regarding this powerful influence, van der Kolk et al. (1996) make this sobering statement:

[63] It is important to note the use of the term "psychological trauma" within the 19th century context is not on par with 21st century models of understanding and research. As Metzger (2014) puts it: "There is no psychological trauma in the late 19th century medicine, only tiny steps towards it. . . . Medicine in the late 19th century shows a significant lack—or at least strong rejection—of concepts which allow for intense experiences to cause health problems" (p. 54).

> The acceptance of psychoanalytic theory resulted in a total absence of research on the effects of real traumatic events on children's lives. From 1895 until very recently [late 20th century], no studies were conducted on the effects of childhood sexual trauma. (p. 56)

This absence combined with the widely accepted Freudian concept of unconscious libidinal urges[64] central to psychoanalytic theory helped create a Western mindset that sufficiently lends itself to rape culture (e.g., "she wanted it") still seen today, and in turning a blind eye to childhood sexual abuse a space was created for atrocious industries such as human trafficking or child pornography to go underground, flourish, and stay largely undetected in current Western culture. It has also allowed for the normalization of the oversexualization of society and the industries of prostitution and pornography to openly thrive as a means of satiating sexual desires. In a very real way, this early suppression of trauma studies and the reasoning therein perpetuated similar trauma for the next century, which was only compounded by the additional trauma wrought by war.

20th Century: Shell Shock and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

While the traumatic neurosis and hysteria of the previous century, along with its nascent trauma studies, would be mostly suppressed and/or forgotten, World War I would sufficiently reintroduce the concept—this time among hundreds of thousands of men.

> Under conditions of unremitting exposure to the horrors of trench warfare, men began to break down in shocking numbers. Confined and rendered helpless, subjected to constant

[64] A concept accepted, but hard to validate through empirical testing. An argument can be made that given such a sexually charged environment the libidinal concept simply made sense—it fit observable behaviors and underlying lusts. Much like Augustine (who also struggled with lust) claimed we have an inherent sinful nature given all the sin in the world, so Freud essentially claimed we have an inherent sexual nature that always seeks to be gratified from birth, as evidenced by the oversexualization of society. Much like original sin has carried explanatory power, so has this aspect of psychoanalytic theory.

> threat of annihilation, and forced to witness the mutilation and death of their comrades without any hope of reprieve, many soldiers began to act like hysterical women. They screamed and wept uncontrollably. They froze and could not move. They became mute and unresponsive. They lost their memory and their capacity to feel. The number of psychiatric casualties was so great that hospitals had to be hastily requisitioned to house them. (Herman, 2015, p. 20)

As mentioned previously, Oppenheim took this opportunity to reintroduce traumatic neurosis, which was summarily refuted by his German colleagues based, again, on lack of physical cause, which was a paradigm that reached beyond Germany's borders as such a cause was sought for combat neurosis. British military psychiatrist Charles Samuel Myers (1873-1946) proposed the concussive effects of explosions upon the body were the physical cause for the soldiers' presenting symptoms (which he termed “shell shock”) but when the same symptoms were found in soldiers who *had not* experienced bombshells or gunfire, ”military psychiatrists were forced to acknowledge that the symptoms of shell shock were due to psychological trauma. The emotional stress of prolonged exposure to violent death was sufficient to produce a neurotic syndrome resembling hysteria in men” (Herman, 2015, p. 20; van der Kolk et al., 1996).

As with railway spine, traumatic neurosis, and hysteria, such a conclusion was not received well by many in the medical community or institutions with vested interests (such as the military), and those afflicted were suspected of malingering, cowardice, or having some constitutional weakness or predisposition—there simply had to be a reason, other than the reality of psychological trauma, for their presenting symptoms (Herman, 2015; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Given the medical, cultural, and political climate of the period, the symptoms were ascribed to the “failure of the individual soldier's willpower” (van der Kolk et al., 1996, p. 50), a

notion that would persist for decades into the second World War. As a result, treatments—if they could be called such—consisted of shaming or punishing soldiers back to the frontline, threatening to court martial or dishonorable discharge them if they did not return to action, or applying painful treatments such as electric shock therapy that made going back to war the preferable option (Herman, 2015; van der Kolk et al., 1996). That said, there were those in the medical community—considered progressive or liberal over against traditionalists—that did argue for combat neurosis being a "bona fide psychiatric condition that could occur in soldiers of high moral character [and they] advocated humane treatment based upon psychoanalytic principles" (Herman, 2015, p. 21). However, the influence of these advocates would not hold sway and any lessons learned from World War I would not make their way into the general population or effect significant change, and yet again, medical interest and information soon faded into the background even though "numerous men with long-lasting psychiatric disabilities crowded the back wards of veterans' hospitals, [but] their presence had become an embarrassment to civilian societies eager to forget" (Herman, 2015, p. 23; van der Kolk et al., 1996).

One notable holdout was American psychiatrist Abram Kardiner (1891-1981) who treated war veterans in New York beginning in the early 1920s, and thus noted the persistence of combat neurosis, i.e., the neurosis developed during wartime remained unabated in these veterans now living in a time of peace (from war, anyway; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Kardiner observed—just as Charcot, Freud, Breuer, and Janet did with women—that the originating traumatic event(s) lived on within those afflicted, thus eliciting the same physiological responses that the originating events drew forth.

Kardiner noted that sufferers from "traumatic neuroses" develop an enduring vigilance

> for and sensitivity to environmental threat . . . He described extreme physiological arousal in his patients, who suffered from sensitivity to temperature, pain, and sudden tactile stimuli . . . [as well as] an altered conception of the self in relation to the world, based on being fixated on the trauma and having an atypical dream life, with chronic irritability, startle reactions, and explosive aggressive reactions. The phobic elaborations on the trauma made his patients look as if they were suffering from long-standing neurosis. . . . Patients became "stuck" in the trauma. (van der Kolk et al., 1996, p. 57)

To describe further,

> Sometimes patients' fixation on the trauma would take the form of dissociative fugue states. For example, triggered by a sensory stimulus, a patient might lash out, employing language suggestive of his trying to defend himself during a military assault. Many patients, while riding the subway and especially upon entering a tunnel, had flashbacks to being in the trenches. In other cases, patients had panic attacks in response to stimuli reminiscent of the trauma, while failing to make a conscious connection between their emotional state and their prior traumatic experience. (van der Kolk et al., 1996, p. 58)

Even though Kardiner's work was available when World War II broke out in 1939—and in 1941 he published *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, which is considered a seminal text on the subject[65]—the episodic amnesia had held over from the end of the first World War and it would take some time before his research and guidelines would be employed in the combat theater, yet in doing so Kardiner's observations and interventions were confirmed and affirmed (van der

[65] Kardiner (1941) did not limit traumatic neurosis to war—which is what makes it a seminal text in the understanding of psychological trauma—as evidenced in the introduction to his book: "The traumatic neurosis is the commonest neurotic disturbance of war. This does not mean that the traumatic neuroses of war differ in any way from the traumatic neuroses of peacetime or from those following upon natural catastrophes like great fires and earthquakes" (p. 3).

Kolk et al., 1996). The next generation of military psychiatrists treating combat neurosis in World War II did much to reduce the stigma associated with it, affirmed any man could become afflicted, "and that psychiatric casualties could be predicted in direct proportion to the severity of combat exposure" (Herman, 2015, p. 25). Furthermore, having discovered (as Kardiner had also argued) that "the strongest protection against overwhelming terror was the degree of relatedness between the soldier, his immediate fighting unit, and their leader" (Herman, 2015, p. 25), strategies were employed to minimize the time of separation between the afflicted and their units, i.e., the supportive relationships and communality were a safeguard against psychological breakdown. Lastly, in efforts to get afflicted soldiers back with their units quickly, psychiatrists rediscovered the use of altered states of consciousness (e.g., the hypnosis employed by Charcot) and catharsis to release the psychological burden of traumatic memories, which worked fairly well in the moment, but failed to consider post-war or long-term outcomes (Herman, 2015).[66] The purpose was to safely return soldiers to war, not back to civilian life.

> Little attention was paid to the fate of these men once they returned to active duty, let alone after they returned home from the war. As long as they could function on a minimal level, they were thought to have recovered. With the end of the war, the familiar process of amnesia set in once again. There was little medical or public interest in the psychological condition of returning soldiers. The lasting effects of war trauma were once again forgotten. (Herman, 2015, p. 26)

It is worth reiterating this last point because it is rather incredulous, as van der Kolk et al. (1996) concur:

> Given the vast experience gained during the war, the dedication of the practitioners, and

[66] An emotional burden may have been lifted, but the trauma would remain. Much like how painkillers can ease the pain of a broken bone and allow a person to function better, they do nothing to heal the break itself.

> the solid collection of data on the combat neuroses, it is astounding how the memory of war trauma was again completely forgotten for the subsequent quarter century. (p. 59)

As astounding as it may be, it validates a premise that Herman (2015) stresses: "To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social [and political] context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance" (p. 9). For example, studying and addressing combat neurosis was legitimated with the social and political support of war efforts, i.e., soldiers needed to stay mobilized and functional, but once war ended and these soldiers returned home there was no supportive context to continue to address the trauma they brought home with them—they were out of sight, out of mind, and, thus, forgotten (Herman, 2015). But fortunately, nearly 25 years after the second World War ended—and over a century from the initial recognition of traumatic neurosis—a group of Vietnam War veterans would not let their suffering be denied or forgotten, and in fighting for recognition and validation they set trauma studies on its current trajectory.

Vietnam veterans not only endured the war and its associated traumatic neuroses that persisted long after returning home, but also absorbed the compounding negative effects (i.e., more trauma) of a country that did not welcome them home and instead vilified them given the growing antiwar movement—which would be the political and social context to support the next wave of interest in trauma studies (Herman, 2015). The group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), had assembled in obvious protest to the ongoing war, but also to support one another through the organization of "rap groups," which were established

> to give solace to individual veterans who had suffered psychological trauma, and to raise awareness about the effects of war. The testimony that came out of these groups focused public attention on the lasting psychological injuries of combat. These veterans refused to

> be forgotten. Moreover, they refused to be stigmatized. They insisted upon the rightness, the dignity of their distress. (Herman, 2015, p. 27)

These rap groups began in 1970 with the help of New York psychoanalysts Chaim Shatan and Robert J. Lifton, who were sympathetic to the veterans' plight and cause (Herman, 2015). As the rap groups grew in number, so did the pressure for further psychiatric research and, with that, ”the Veterans’ Administration commissioned comprehensive studies tracing the impact of wartime experiences on the lives of returning veterans [that] delineated the syndrome of post-traumatic stress disorder and demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt its direct relationship to combat exposure” (Herman, 2015, p. 27). Notably, the delineation of symptoms derived from the studies were consonant with Kardiner's findings nearly 40 years prior but had been promptly forgotten when the supporting context evaporated (Herman, 2015). However, buoyed by the enormous amount of supportive data and concomitantly amenable political and social climate, Lifton and Shatan, along with representatives from the VVAW, were able to successfully lobby the American Psychiatric Association to create and add the new diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to its third iteration of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* published in 1980 (van der Kolk, 2014). Psychological trauma finally gained formal recognition in what is considered the “gold standard” for diagnosis in the mental health community, and the afflicted finally gained validation.

> Systematically identifying the symptoms and grouping them together into a disorder finally gave a name to the suffering of people who were overwhelmed by horror and helplessness. With the conceptual framework of PTSD in place, the stage was set for a radical change in our understanding of our patients. This eventually led to an explosion of research and attempts at finding effective treatments. (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 19)

Hysteria Revisited. Given that the history of psychological trauma has periodically forgotten the afflicted for significant spans of times, we would be remiss to not revisit the plight of women with hysteria. With the political and social unrest that produced the antiwar movement that supported the VVAW and the formal recognition of PTSD, the women's liberation movement in the U.S. was also able to gain traction in the 1970s and bring into public recognition "that the most common post-traumatic disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life" (Herman, 2015, p. 28). Recall that hysteria in women had been recognized but unlocalizable and unaddressed for centuries (perhaps millennia) prior to the in-depth studies by Charcot, Janet, Freud, and Breuer in the late 19th century that revealed a prevailing cause was sexual abuse, e.g., childhood sexual abuse or marital rape. Given this connection between hysteria and sexual abuse, it is quite plausible (if not likely) such was the cause of hysteria down through the ages. Recall also that instead of receiving understanding, validation, help, and healing, Freud's recantation of his findings and—worse—his suggestion women and children unconsciously desired the sexual exploitation, not only cast doubt on women's complaints, but compounded their suffering while simultaneously encouraging a climate for the continuation, if not the escalation, of sexual abuse within the private realm of the home well into the 20th century.

> The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life. The cherished value of privacy created a powerful barrier to consciousness and rendered women's reality practically invisible. To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation. (Herman, 2105, p. 28)

But nearly a century after being sufficiently silenced, women would find their voice. Still being discounted and disbelieved by most of the medical community, women formed groups like the rap groups of the VVAW where they could share their experiences of sexual abuse, exploitation, and rape—and be believed and mutually supported (Herman, 2015). The movement had the same effect the VVAW did, and in 1975 the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) created a center for research on rape where results "confirmed the reality of women's experiences that Freud had dismissed as fantasies a century before. Sexual assaults against women and children were shown to be pervasive and endemic in our culture" (Herman, 2015, p. 30)—just as they were endemic in Freud's day—which then paved the way for the (re)recognition and study of childhood sexual abuse that had ceased in the late 19th century. After 1980, when PTSD had been formally recognized and psychological trauma legitimated in combat veterans, "it [became] clear that the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery, and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war" (Herman, 2015, p. 32). Therefore, what combat neurosis was to men, hysteria was to women, and another set of sufferers found vindication and validation.

In the closing decades of the 20th century, bolstered by a mountain of data bearing witness to suffering men and women, psychological trauma became a firmly established phenomenon and field of inquiry that launched an "explosion of research," saw many academic, scientific, and healthcare professionals choosing to specialize in the field, as well as the establishment of organizations worldwide dedicated to studying the effects of trauma in adults and children, which included the NIMH who continued and expanded their commitment to such study by developing a Violence and Traumatic Stress branch (Herman, 2015; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Furthermore, rapidly advancing technology and U.S. governmental support for expanding

research on the brain—and declaring the 1990s "The Decade of the Brain"—allowed for a deeper assessment and understanding of the impact of trauma on the biological, neurophysiological, neuropsychological, and cognitive dimensions of the brain, mind, and childhood development (Herman, 2015; Siegel, 2020; van der Kolk, 2014). But as we close out this section of history with all its substantial gains—yet also still plagued by familiar controversies—one must wonder, as Herman (2015) did and astutely observed from the history thus far, will it somehow become forgotten and lost once again?

Trauma in the 21st Century: U.S. Edition

I turned nine-years-old the year PTSD made it into DSM-III and grew up relatively free of the diagnostic criteria delineated for the diagnosis.[67] The Vietnam War had ended, and while the Cold War kept me in fear of Russians (of the then Soviet Union), communism, and the seemingly ever-present threat of nuclear war, such things never materialized, and both the Cold War and the Soviet Union ended during my college years.[68] Times were relatively peaceful otherwise, and my only struggles were those considered "normal" life stressors (which are entirely subjective, and often generationally and geographically informed). Trauma was something I would learn about in physical therapy school, i.e., physical wounds, bone fractures, and soft tissue injury, and nothing of the sort discussed herein. Even my required psychology courses did not introduce me to the concept of psychological trauma, and I cannot ever remember discussing PTSD, but I *do* remember learning about Freud's psychoanalytic theory,

[67] "Relatively" is intentional. DSM-III did not include childhood posttraumatic stress symptoms in the criteria, which would receive mention in DSM-III-R in 1987, but only based on expert clinical experience and not empirical validation. As such, PTSD in children would remain contested through the reign of DSM-IV (i.e., through 2013 when DSM-5 was published; Blom & Oberink, 2012).

[68] To add a personal note, I wrote this chapter months prior to the war in Ukraine. As I do final edits while the war is currently ongoing, the anxiety and fears from my childhood years have been activated, and I know I am not alone. Imagine the many more from my entire generation, as well as the generations prior who experienced the same, and one might begin to understand one relatively small aspect that fuels the pervasive anxiety seen in the U.S. (and beyond).

the unconscious id, ego, and superego, and psychosexual stages of development, thus being taught the dominant Western psychological paradigm. Given my experience, which included living in several different geographic locations in the U.S. by the age of 30, being employed in healthcare, and working with impaired and injured people daily, I can safely say psychological trauma was not on my radar—and if I am any barometer, it was not in the radar of the public either. My only exposure to PTSD during those years was through media coverage of Gulf War veterans in the early 1990s, who then quickly faded from public view to suffer silently as so many other combat veterans had experienced in years past (and still do). The political and social climate had changed again from that of the 1960s and 70s. There were no antiwar protests or active women's movements to unsettle our consciousness, and the swift U.S. victory in a televised war garnered little emotion or attention yet galvanized our mindset as a world power not to be reckoned with. We came, we saw, we conquered; war was once again viewed as necessary and just. As for the sexual exploitation of women (and children), that continued relatively unabated and had become normalized in song and visual media. Sexual harassment was on the rise as women increased their presence in the workplace, but thanks to the courage of Anita Hill bringing it to national attention, workplace policies were subsequently amended and strengthened. However, such policies did not carry over into private lives and homes, nor did it bear witness to its psychological impact, as prolonged stress resulting from workplace harassment has also been found to result in PTSD (Brewin et al., 2009). Overall, both men and women no longer found the culture to be a sympathetic witness to psychological trauma, and by the turn of the century (with all eyes fixed on Y2K), history seemed to be repeating itself—PTSD and its sufferers were fading from the public consciousness.

But then came September 11, 2001, and a terrorized nation launched a full-scale war on

terror that lasted for well over a decade, keeping us on guard, in fear, and suspicious of others. The entire nation—not just U.S. troops—was exposed to traumatic events either primarily or secondarily. Mainstream media kept it front and center in our minds with constant commentary running night and day, along with many other potentially traumatic events worldwide. A once relatively peaceful nation was now hypervigilant and reactive at national, local, and individual levels of engagement. Social media was on the rise and all such content (and so much more, especially of a sexual nature) started streaming in our faces through handheld devices, and simultaneously something was shifting in the cultural milieu. By the early 2010s "The Snowflake Generation" became a popular term (and politicized in 2016) and was used to castigate anyone (but mostly aimed at the U.S. generation of Millennials) who seemed prone to take offense and unable to handle what were considered the "normal" rigors of life.[69] What was happening? Fast forward to November 9, 2016, when the nation was waking up to the news Donald Trump was elected president and social media (especially my Twitter feed) was buzzing with people stating how traumatized they were by the outcome, and many described the election as a traumatic event. How could the results of an election be deemed a traumatic event? The phenomenon of ubiquitous trauma mentioned at the outset had arrived—and I have not yet mentioned increasing racial tensions and protests over the past decade, pervasive and escalating gun violence over the last two decades, the intensely divisive political climate of the last two election cycles, the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, or the global pandemic (and all its collateral damage) of the last two years. This is the traumatizing and traumatized culture of the U.S. thus far into the 21st century.

[69] As previously mentioned, what are considered "rigors" (or stressors) are subjective to time, place, and generation, etc. But, as Brewin et al. (2009) note, individual vulnerability and reactivity to said rigors can also be impacted by such things as genetics, epigenetics, prior trauma, and/or cumulative lifetime exposure to trauma.

But I have taken what appears to be a large leap from the trauma discussed under the framework of PTSD in 1980 to the ubiquitous trauma in 2022. Indeed, trauma seems to have blown itself out of the box it was put in over 40 years ago. That is not to say PTSD is not a valid experience and diagnosis unto itself—it assuredly remains so—but it is to say trauma is significantly more complex and pervasive than the constructed framework of PTSD alone has allowed for, and to which our understanding of trauma has been confined for decades. With that, our social climate is not only lending support (and perhaps even crying out) for deeper exploration and understanding, but also offering widespread evidence of the complexity of trauma.

Defining Trauma for Today. Fortunately, despite PTSD seemingly losing public attention in the late 20th century given our relative state of peace (recall the kind of political and social climate needed to support its investigation), it successfully retained the interests of many in the medical, scientific, and academic communities, allowing for the development of a deeper understanding of trauma over time.[70] In 1980, the DSM-III did not specifically define psychological trauma—the underlying *what* or *why* or *how* of trauma—but rather developed criteria so people could be diagnosed with PTSD, be acknowledged in their suffering, and then be adequately supported and treated.[71] This was an important step on the journey to in-depth understanding, but at the time the etiological focus remained on an external event, i.e., the *event* was the trauma spoken of, consistent with the history of those in decades and centuries past

[70] It is also likely attention waned given the egregious nature of precipitating events for PTSD diagnoses, relegating PTSD to such subpopulations as combat veterans and victims of violent physical or sexual abuse. Such marginalization helped move it (and its sufferers) out of public consciousness at the time.

[71] DSM-I (1952) and II (1968) had preliminary versions of PTSD called Gross Stress Reaction and Transient Situational Disturbances, respectively, and any symptoms were 1) thought to be directly caused by significant and specific precipitating events (e.g., combat, or civilian catastrophes) and 2) were believed to be transient, leading clinicians to consider other diagnoses if symptoms persisted (Tumminio Hansen, 2021). Hence, the diagnosis of PTSD was a long-awaited help for many.

seeking a somatic or material cause for unlocalizable symptoms. American sociologist Kai Erickson (1991) frames this concept well:

> In classical medical usage, "trauma" refers to a blow to the tissues of the body . . . that results in an injury or some other disturbance. It is not an infection welling up from within, then. It is not a growth or a rupture or a blockage that originates inside. It is an assault from outside that breaks into the space one occupies as a person and damages the interior.
>
> Trauma, in this usage, refers not to the injury but to the blow that inflicted it, not to the state of mind but to the event that provoked it. To speak of "post-traumatic stress disorder," . . . is to accommodate—awkwardly, I have always thought—to that medical convention. The disorder, that is, is named for the stimulus that brought it into being, a logic very like the one that would be at work if mumps were known as "post-exposure glandular disorder." (pp. 455-456)

However, this logic is what makes PTSD unique and separates it from other diagnoses in the DSM, as it *requires* an "etiological, or originating, event" (Tumminio Hansen, 2021) that can be linked to symptom onset, which lent itself to immediate and ongoing controversy as it raises the question: what qualifies as a valid originating event (Brewin et al., 2009)?

Trauma as the Originating Event. While the DSM, now in its fifth iteration, has remained consistent over time with an essential core of diagnostic criteria for PTSD, i.e., symptoms of re-experiencing the originating event, avoidance and/or numbing to traumatic stimuli, and physiological hyperarousal,[72] what has significantly changed is the nature and scope of the originating event (see Table 1), which is the first diagnostic criterion (Criterion A) listed

[72] See Appendix for the full DSM-5 PTSD description.

for PTSD, and upon which much emphasis has been placed by the DSM PTSD Working Group (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1980; APA, 2013; McNally, 2009).

Table 1

Changes to Criterion A (originating event) for PTSD across DSM editions

DSM Edition	Text of Criterion A
DSM-III	Existence of a recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone. (APA, 1980, p. 238)
DSM-III-R (Revised)	The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, e.g., serious threat to one's life or physical integrity; serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being, seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence. (APA, 1987, p. 250)
DSM-IV	The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present: (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. **Note:** In children, this may be expressed instead by disorganized or

	agitated behavior (APA, 1994, pp. 427-428)
DSM-5	Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: 1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s). 2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others. 3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental. 4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse). **Note**: Criterion A4 does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related. (APA, 2013, p. 271)

As can be seen in Table 1, the subjective or ambiguous nature of what qualifies as an originating event is present in earlier editions. For example, what stressors *should* "evoke distress symptoms in almost everyone"? And what if certain "recognizable" stressors do not? What may be distressing to one person may not be so for another, and vice versa. What exclusions apply for events "outside the range of usual human experience"? Consider the endemic sexual exploitation and abuse discovered by Freud and corroborated a century later with studies in the U.S.; while such abuse should be outside the norm of human experience, its prevalence situates it as a tragic norm for many women and children (Herman, 2015). Lastly, what if a threat to one's "physical

integrity" occurred, yet at the time there were no feelings of "intense fear, helplessness, or horror," but several months later posttraumatic symptoms appear and persist? Given these kinds of questions, DSM Working Groups employed a "conceptual bracket creep" (McNally, 2009, p. 597), i.e., the expansion of criteria, that broadened the scope and nature of the originating event. This is evidenced in Table 1 by the growth of Criterion A from one sentence in DSM-III to a paragraph with several parts and qualifiers in DSM-5, which has been beneficial for validating the traumatic experiences and subsequent posttraumatic stress symptoms of a wider range of people, as well as (and arguably more importantly) qualifying them for reimbursable treatment (McNally, 2009; Tumminio Hansen, 2021). One also notes, though, the increasingly specific and egregious nature of the originating event from something that "would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone" to a necessary "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence."[73] Given the history of the development of psychological trauma—meaning that traumatic symptoms usually manifested only after the most egregious experiences of violence, injury, or threat of death—it is understandable the medical community would expect and seek such an egregious originating event rather than lesser, non-life-threatening events to stay true to its original construct and conceptualization of trauma (Brewin et al., 2009; Friedman, n.d.; Marzillier, 2014). As Friedman (n.d.) explains:

> The framers of the original PTSD diagnosis had in mind events such as war, torture, rape, the Nazi Holocaust, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, natural disasters (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcano eruptions), and human-made disasters (such as factory explosions, airplane crashes, and automobile accidents). They considered

[73] The DSM-5 PTSD Working Group also dropped Criterion A2 ("intense fear, helplessness, or horror") present in DSM-IV, acknowledging that individual responses to external events vary greatly and "confounds the response with the stimulus" (McNally, 2009, p. 597; Brewin et al., 2009).

> traumatic events to be clearly different from the very painful stressors that constitute the normal vicissitudes of life such as divorce, failure, rejection, serious illness, financial reverses, and the like. (Friedman, n.d., para. 3)

But what if someone presents with symptoms consistent with PTSD yet fails to meet Criterion A? What if posttraumatic symptoms are found to arise from an event considered by Friedman (n.d.) to be within the "normal vicissitudes of life"? Such was the case in many hysteria patients of Freud and Breuer in the 19th century, and 21st century research continues to bear this out (Brewin et al., 2009). Indeed, both historical and current "research has shown that experiencing a major trauma is neither necessary nor sufficient for the diagnosis of PTSD" (Marzillier, 2014, p. 26). For example, in DSM-5, as seen in Table 1, there is a qualifier for Criterion A4 exposure in that it cannot come through electronic media. However, in their review of research studies that assessed the validity of PTSD criteria in youth, Blom and Oberink (2012) found studies showing PTSD *did* result in some youth from simply hearing about traumatic events from others or through television media, and, notably, those studies were prior to social media use that would magnify such exposure (and also prior to DSM-5, meaning, such research was available for a decade or more for the DSM-5 Working Group to consider). Hence, contrary to the qualifier for Criterion A4, there is evidence to show exposure to traumatic events through electronic media can and does result in PTSD.[74] However, "[u]nder DSM-5, this can no longer constitute PTSD. But the fact indirect exposure leads to PTSD-like symptoms is not insignificant. This shows the limitation of a categorical system like DSM" (Marzillier, 2014, p. 30). To demonstrate that further, Holmes et al. (2016) note Criterion A fails to name oppression

[74] Aside from PTSD, consumption of electronic (and social) media results in other negative mental health outcomes. For example, Facebook's own research revealed the negative impact of Instagram on the mental health of teenage girls (Wells et al., 2021), which speaks to the power of social media to negatively impact and influence. It is only a matter of time before empirical studies bear this out in full.

(arguably another normal lived experience for some) as an originating event despite the abundant research citing its negative impact on the mental health of marginalized people groups, some of whom present with PTSD symptoms without any other Criterion A event. With that, Holmes et al. (2016) propose expanding Criterion A to include oppression but simultaneously acknowledge the evidence of other "non-Criterion A events [that also] develop reexperiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal symptoms" (p. 319) in individuals. This reality lends itself to what would become a "never-ending bracket creep" (Tumminio Hansen, 2021)—just how many other events or qualifiers must be added (or amended) to Criterion A before posttraumatic stress symptoms are validated for all who experience them? With that, Tumminio Hansen (2021) questions, as others have (Brewin et al., 2009), if Criterion A is even necessary, especially given few diagnoses in the DSM require the identification of an originating event,[75] and further states

> there exists an infinite variety of [experiences] of harm, as well as an infinite variety of how individuals process that harm. So, the presence or absence of PTSD winds up being contingent not just on the pragmatics of the event, but also on so many factors relating to human experience, that it makes it almost impossible to predict whether something is going to be understood as traumatic based on the pragmatics of the event itself.

And therein lies the problem. If we continually need a certain category event to explain and justify experiences and symptoms of trauma, then we *will* end up with a never-ending bracket creep. But the reason this conversation is even being had is because PTSD is the only validated framework in the DSM that has defined, validated, and justified reimbursable treatment of trauma. Without other accepted options for understanding the etiology and nature of trauma, the

[75] The new category of Trauma- or Stressor-Related Disorders was added to DSM-5 and "[only includes] disorders in which exposure to a traumatic or stressful event is listed explicitly as a diagnostic criterion" (APA, 2013, p. 265). To note, PTSD was moved from its previous category of Anxiety Disorders to this new category for DSM-5.

afflicted will continue to suffer in the shadows without acknowledgement, validation, or reimbursable treatment. But, akin to the combat veterans and women's groups that went before them, there are many who have become more vocal and are seeking answers and treatment outside the mainstream medical communities. However, many of them also continue to be ignored, dismissed, or even vilified because they lack the gold stamp approval of a PTSD diagnosis, indicating their suffering is not considered valid or real. With so many people manifesting symptoms consistent with PTSD, but failing to meet its full criteria for diagnosis, it is well past time to expand beyond the PTSD diagnosis and free trauma from those confines,[76] which many professionals have done regardless of the gold standard; they are not waiting for the DSM to catch up to the reality that walks into their offices daily.

Trauma as an Internal Event.

> The development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a diagnosis has created an organized framework for understanding how people's biology, conceptions of the world, and personalities are inextricably intertwined and shaped by experience. The PTSD diagnosis has reintroduced the notion that many "neurotic" symptoms are not the results of some mysterious, well-nigh inexplicable, genetically based irrationality, but of people's inability to come to terms with real experiences that have overwhelmed their capacity to cope. (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p. 4)

Those statements were made over 25 years ago and the PTSD diagnosis has been another significant steppingstone in the history of trauma as it provided a necessary framework to build upon, and since its inception much research (empirically and anecdotally) has been done to

[76] Allen (2013) would agree and foreshadows some of the argumentation in this dissertation: "The inclusion of PTSD in the diagnostic lexicon in the 1980s has contributed to a narrow conception of trauma . . . I have taken a far wider view in emphasizing the potentially traumatic consequences associated with repeated experiences of psychological disconnection in attachment relationships in the context of extreme distress" (p. 210).

expand our understanding of trauma. Two notable contributions since then are Herman's (2015) diagnosis of Complex PTSD (CPTSD) proffered in 1988 and van der Kolk's (2014) diagnosis of Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) proffered in 2009, but neither diagnosis has been accepted into the DSM despite a considerable amount of clinical experience, evidence, and empirical research to justify their inclusion.[77] Regardless, the contributions have helped to expand the understanding of trauma beyond that associated with an egregious single-event trauma, and even if the DSM has yet to accept them, many mental health professionals have and employ and/or extrapolate from them in their practices. We will look at each briefly to acknowledge their contributions to our understanding of trauma.

A commonality with CPTSD and DTD is the *chronicity* of the precipitating adverse circumstances, with the former applying to both adults and children, and the latter relating to children and the specific impact it has on their development (such effects can then reach well into adulthood). Van der Kolk (2014) describes the precipitating exposure for DTD as follows:

> The child or adolescent has experienced or witnessed multiple or prolonged adverse events over a period of at least one year beginning in childhood or early adolescence, including . . . [d]irect experience or witnessing of repeated and severe episodes of interpersonal violence; and [s]ignificant disruptions of protective caregiving as the result of repeated changes in primary caregiver; repeated separation from the primary caregiver; or exposure to severe and persistent emotional abuse. (p. 360)

Herman (2015) describes the precipitating history for CPTSD as follows:

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[77] Notably, CPTSD was recently added to the eleventh iteration of the *International Classification of Diseases (ICD),* which went into effect January 2022. The ICD is put out by the World Health Organization (WHO) and is used by all types of healthcare workers globally, and not just those in mental health, as it covers a myriad of diagnoses across multiple disciplines. The DSM, by contrast, is an APA publication unique to the U.S. (although it is used internationally as well), and its focus is only on mental health disorders.

> A history of subjection to totalitarian control over a prolonged period (months to years). Examples include hostages, prisoners of war, concentration-camp survivors, and survivors of some religious cults. Examples also include those subjected to totalitarian systems in sexual and domestic life, including those subjected to domestic battering, childhood physical or sexual abuse, and organized sexual exploitation. (p. 121)

While the use of "totalitarian" may seem a preclusive descriptor, especially within the home environment, one need only substitute *authoritarian* to get essentially the same effect. An authoritarian parent exercising strict control over a powerless child is form of a totalitarian system, and even in the absence of physical or sexual abuse, the resultant control—often coupled with verbal, emotional, and/or psychological abuse (or neglect)—can be traumatizing.[78]

The resultant effects or symptoms of CPTSD and DTD have several areas of overlap, and also overlap with those of PTSD. For example, child or adult sufferers can demonstrate alterations in 1) affect regulation (e.g., depression, emotional lability, or suicidal ideations); 2) consciousness (e.g., dissociation, excessive ruminations, or inability to concentrate); 3) self-perception (e.g., shame, self-blame, or self-loathing); 4) perception of the perpetrator or caregiver (e.g., idealization, or being preoccupied with the relationship); 5) relationships with others (e.g., withdrawal, distrust, defiance, or aggression); 6) systems of meaning (e.g., loss of faith, sense of hopelessness, or despair); and functional impairment (e.g., disruption of work, school, or family responsibilities; Herman, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014).[79]

While it appears, in reading those descriptions, that CPTSD and DTD are not much different than PTSD proper—which is true in many respects—Herman and van der Kolk's work

[78] Note there is a considerable difference between authoritarian parenting and *authoritative* parenting, which is healthy and nurturing while still setting boundaries commensurate with developmental age.
[79] To reference the full criteria for CPTSD and DTD, the reader is referred to Herman, 2015, p. 121, and van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 360-362, respectively.

(along with that of others') still effectively expanded the conversation on trauma in meaningful ways.[80] First, there was a recognition of the complexity and chronicity of traumatic symptoms in those exposed to prolonged adverse circumstances, and those circumstances could be of varying degrees and not necessarily commensurate with the criteria for PTSD, CPTSD, or DTD. Second, as it pertains to children, it was revealed how chronic adverse circumstances negatively impact all aspects of their development (Burke Harris, 2018), thus providing a new lens through which to look at behavior (and disease). Third, it focused attention on the *relationality* of trauma. PTSD was (and is) often more focused on external, material originating events than interpersonal ones, and even when an event is interpersonal in nature (e.g., sexual or physical assault), the focus is on the severity of the singular event rather than chronic, interpersonal and/or developmental trauma that occurs in more intimate, caregiving, or longstanding dysfunctional, toxic, and injurious relationships. But what may be the most significant contribution (or result), assuredly combined with advances in the neuroscience of trauma over the last 40 years, was the shift from trauma being seen as an external adverse event (or series of events), to that of an internal physiological series of events. Traumatic signs and symptoms have indeed become ubiquitous, and linking them to specific external events, chronic or otherwise, has become more elusive. Furthermore, hunting down external originating causes is a hindrance to providing proper treatment, but shifting the focus to what is going on internally proves profitable because "the body keeps the score" (van der Kolk, 2014). Menakem (2017) explains this well:

> Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or

[80] One way, unrelated to defining trauma, was in refocusing attention upon and validating the reality of these chronically adverse situations that had been suppressed and forgotten over a century prior, especially for women and children.

> ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous. The body is where we fear, hope, and react; where we constrict and release; and where we reflexively fight, flee, or freeze. (p. 5)

Therefore, even if people cannot cognitively recall traumatizing events, or recognize traumatizing systems or relationships they lived within, their bodies can and will when given the opportunity, offering up "wordless stories" that tell of unresolved past traumas that have become internalized and capable of being reactivated, because the trauma has become *embodied.* Thus, the shift from an external search to an internal one has opened new avenues of exploration and treatment, because the answer can be retrieved from within.[81]

It is unlikely that one researcher or clinician (not even Herman or van der Kolk) can be attributed with this shift—or at least I am unaware of such—but rather in the mix of progressive research, professional dialogues, interdisciplinary consilience, and clinical experience, what emerged was an understanding of trauma that was defined less by the nature of external events and much more by what was happening within a person in response to those events. Recalling the quote from van der Kolk and McFarlane (1996) at the beginning of this section, our understanding of trauma has shifted to defining it more along the lines of: "people's inability to come to terms with real experiences that have overwhelmed their capacity to cope" (p. 4). To be clear, trauma is no longer predominantly considered the event itself, e.g., a car accident, physical assault, natural disaster, or pandemic, especially since several people could experience any or all of those things yet only some might suffer trauma as a result, so trauma cannot rightly be considered just the event. Trauma is now better understood to be an internal series of events, i.e.,

[81] It can be noted that this idea was already present with Charcot, Freud and Breuer, and was thus another missed opportunity to deal with trauma effectively from a much earlier time.

"a specific and automatic collection of physiological responses to an event, which are triggered when an individual's or community's adaptive capacity is overwhelmed" (Warner et al., 2019, p. 1). Others working alongside the traumatized have voiced similar definitions, further demonstrating the collective shift away from that of the DSM: "If we think of trauma as Robert Macy (president of the International Trauma Center) defined it, [it is] 'an overwhelming demand placed upon the physiological human system . . .'" (Dana, 2018, p. 17), and is "a distinct type of suffering that overwhelms a person's normal capacity to cope" (Frechette & Boase, 2016, p. 2) that also "causes a crisis of meaning within the life of an individual or a community" (Tumminio Hansen, 2021). "Trauma is, by definition, unbearable and intolerable" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 1). But Canadian psychotherapist, Dr. Hillary McBride, probably summarizes the current consensus best with her definition (handed down from a mentor): "trauma is a negative and unexpected event, and leaves a person feeling confused, overwhelmed, and powerless." (Gungor & McHargue, 2017, 13:07).

Mészáros (2010) expands upon these understandings and definitions of trauma by voicing a crucial element:

> [It] is characterized by the fact that a set of physical and/or psychic stimuli affecting the personality *exceeds the tolerance level of the individual's given developmental stage/condition* [emphasis added]. The individual, therefore, is incapable by the usual means available of preventing, stopping or effectively processing this set of psychically damaging stimuli or of restoring the previous state of balance. (p. 330)

This carries import because it removes the notion that traumatizing events must be egregious in nature and allows children (or those developmentally delayed or impaired) to be included who—due to their developmental stage—are traumatized by "minor" events or chronic stressors that

would be considered inconsequential or a part of normal daily life for rational, experienced adults. For example, a young child being scared by a playful adult jumping out of a closet may experience trauma if it exceeds the child's ability to understand and cope with it, especially if the adult does not mediate to help restore physiological and psychological balance to the child (Siegel, 2020). If unresolved, the trauma gets stored in the body and can be reactivated at any time (Menakem, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014), so any future openings of closet doors may activate (or "trigger") the autonomic nervous system causing anxiety and/or fight, flight, or freeze responses (Dana, 2018). As the child grows into adulthood and those responses remain, they will seem irrational and perhaps silly to the adult self, but the body remembers the unresolved childhood experience (i.e., trauma) and reacts accordingly to self-protect.[82] While that example is very minor yet still potentially traumatizing, consider children who grow up in homes (such as Herman (2015) and van der Kolk (2014) describe) where they are consistently berated, disciplined harshly, abused, or held to unreasonable expectations of behavior given their age. The amount of autonomic nervous system activation in these children on a daily basis is manifold—and formative. Furthermore, this trauma does not result from isolated incidents or external material events, but rather relational injury (i.e., caused by those with whom they are in relationship), and if there is a lack of mediation or repair in the relationship, the trauma will remain and become an embodied part of the foundation from which these children function and develop their identity (Siegel, 2020; Dana, 2018). "This possibly leads us to a fairly concrete definition of trauma: Any experience of fear and/or pain that doesn't have the support it needs to be digested and integrated into the flow of our developing brains" (Badenoch, 2018, pp. 22-23).

[82] Ultimately, that is what our brain and body is designed to do: self-protect and survive. When something in our environment threatens our safety—perceived or real—the brain and body (a singular entity) reacts accordingly to first protect itself before any rational thought enters into the equation.

Badenoch (2018) further adds:

> This definition encourages us to look into the neural and interpersonal aspects of experience for an understanding of how we become traumatized rather than toward the nature of the experience itself or a list of symptoms. We might consider the embedding of trauma to be a rupture in the inherent process of neural integration of our ongoing experience, with healing arising through the initiation of an experience of repair so that the journey toward integration can follow its natural course. (p. 23)

Trauma from relational injury (or *relational breaches*, if you will) is just one (yet ubiquitous) source for consideration, as there are numerous other adverse childhood experiences including poverty, racism, exposure to violence (domestic or otherwise), and living under persistent threat (real or perceived) that can induce, and perpetuate, trauma. But trauma from relational injury is much more prevalent, can be found in any time, place, or culture, and can occur from a simple misunderstanding on the part of the parent to the opposite extreme of overt, chronic, and complex abuse. But why linger long on childhood trauma resulting from relational injury? Because those children grow into adults whose foundations were unconsciously built upon trauma, and unbeknownst to them, the unresolved trauma has significantly informed their identities, their worldviews, how they relate to others, and how they respond to adversity (Siegel, 2020; Dana, 2018). Trauma experienced as an adult, e.g., from accidents or during military service, is also significant and impacts thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors (van der Kolk, 2014), but I argue it is the pervasive childhood trauma that goes unnoticed and unresolved, and when repeatedly activated fuels the problematic behaviors from childhood through adulthood that some might call “sin” and evidence of a “sinful” nature. Furthermore, Menakem (2017) adds this for consideration:

> As years and decades pass, reflexive traumatic responses can lose context. A person may forget [or be unaware] that something happened to him or her—and then internalize the trauma responses. These responses are typically viewed by others, and often by the person, as a personality defect. When this same strategy gets internalized and passed down over generations within a particular group, it can start to look like culture. Therapists call this a traumatic retention. (Menakem, 2017, p. 9)

And when these traumatic retentions of past embodied trauma are passed down over thousands of years and across all cultures, *it can start to look like humanity has an inherently sinful nature.*

Conclusion

Thousands of years ago humans experienced psychological and physiological signs and symptoms that appeared to have no obvious somatic cause, but nonetheless drove them to think, act, and emote in ways that could only be described then as "hysterical" (or perhaps even "sinful"). But in times of uncivilized tribal warfare, survival was paramount, and hypervigilance and hyperarousal were likely the psychological and physiological norm for many, and, therefore, also advantageous to a large degree. Such states of mind and body could not be understood by ancient people in the manner and context we understand them today, nor would they have likely given it much thought as those in survival mode place their mental energies and awareness elsewhere. But fast forward a few millennia to more civilized and enlightened times, and such queries began to occur.

We have taken a journey of over 150 years in this chapter, which is the length of time it took to come to an understanding of what lies beneath hysterical, unbecoming, dysfunctional, and yes, even sinful behaviors—in a word, trauma. Just like physical trauma is a disruption of body tissues caused by an event that exceeds the capacity of the tissues to withstand it,

psychological trauma is the disruption of the psyche by an event that exceeds its ability to withstand it (i.e., cope), and the two forms of trauma can, and often do, occur simultaneously. However, historically we have almost exclusively focused on healing the former than the latter, and even going so far as to deny the latter exists—but we came by it honestly. While physical trauma has been and is relatively easy to see, treat, and heal, psychological trauma is invisible, and occurs within physiological and nervous systems that, until very recently, could not be seen or well understood. Therefore, psychological trauma was left unacknowledged and unhealed, but just like unhealed physical trauma leads to physical impairment and dysfunction, unhealed psychological trauma leads to psychological (and physiological) impairment and dysfunction. However, unlike physical trauma that essentially affects only the injured individual, psychological "trauma is contagious" (Herman, 2015, p. 140). Menakem (2017) explains:

> Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone's personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture.
>
> But it isn't culture. *It's a traumatic retention that has lost its context over time. Though without context, it has not lost its power. Traumatic retentions can have a profound effect on what we do, think, feel, believe, experience, and find meaningful.* [emphasis added].
>
> What we call out as individual personality flaws, dysfunctional family dynamics, or twisted cultural norms [—or transgressions, iniquities, and sins—] are sometimes

> manifestations of historical trauma. These traumatic retentions may have served a purpose at one time—provided protection, supported resilience, inspired hope, etc.—but generations later, when adaptations continue to be acted out in situations where they are no longer necessary or helpful, they get defined as dysfunctional [or sinful] behavior on the individual, family, or cultural level. (p. 39)

Or on the level of humanity itself, it can get defined as an inherently sinful nature.

It is important to state that identifying trauma as an underlying cause of much of the dysfunction and sin experienced in the world does not absolve people of their personal responsibility for their thoughts and actions or the associated guilt and consequences. Becoming aware of the pervasiveness of trauma in the world and how it has fashioned and formed us as individuals and collectives (as well as the resultant dysfunctional or sinful systems we have created), obligates us to not only take responsibility for how we think, believe, and behave, but to also take responsibility for acknowledging and healing the trauma in our individual selves and communities that undergirds and perpetuates sinful, dysfunctional, and potentially traumatizing ways of thinking, believing, and behaving. With that, healing then helps bring about the abatement of sin and halts the perpetuation of trauma in future generations, which gives both the foundation and opportunity for humans to flourish.

Lastly, what has also been revealed in our historical overview of trauma is how early in life trauma can be, and often is, experienced, due in part to an infant or child's vulnerability and limited capacity to cope with potentially traumatizing events. Unknown (or unacknowledged) and unresolved childhood trauma due to material events or relational injury (or breaches)—with the latter being much more prevalent—is not only disruptive to the autonomic nervous system and developing brain, but also deeply formative of identity, relational dynamics, and worldviews,

i.e., “this is who I am, and this is how things work.” This will be discussed further in the next chapter, where we will see just how early these traumatic foundations can begin—as early as the 8th month of gestation, but more profoundly within the first year of life.

Chapter 4: Human Formation Through Relationship

As a means of introduction, and to facilitate a connection between trauma (as discussed in the previous chapter) and how it correlates to the topic of this chapter, a series of prompts and questions will be offered for consideration. You may want to have pen and paper ready to write down your thoughts and thereby move through the prompts and questions more reflectively, or you can just take mental notes and move through them at a quicker pace.

To begin, you will mentally situate yourself back in your childhood (if you do not feel comfortable doing so, you can skip past this and go to the next section heading). When you are ready to start, think about where you grew up, putting yourself in that time and place, and think about what it was like to grow up where and when you did, and with whom you did. Next, think about your relationship with your parents (or those people who were parents to you), and then focus your thoughts upon the parent or person who primarily cared for you. Holding that primary caregiver in mind, write down five words that reflect or represent your early childhood relationship with that person—do not think too long or hard about the words, take whatever comes to mind without question or judgment. Once you have those five words, think of and write down one experience or memory that serves as an example for each of those words as they relate to your primary caregiver. Lastly, write down which adult in your early life you felt closest to as a child (this person may or may not be your primary caregiver).

Now you will respond to a few questions. First, when you were upset as a child, what would you do? Write down a few words or short phrases of what comes to mind. Next, recall the first time you remember being separated from your primary caregiver. How did you respond and how did your primary caregiver respond? Write down what comes to mind. Was your primary caregiver ever threatening to you in any way? Acknowledge any incidents that come to mind if

they do. Lastly, in general, how do you think your overall experiences with your primary caregiver have affected your adult personality? Take some time to think about this and write something down about who you are today in light of those experiences.

Attachment

Those prompts and questions were intended to prime your mind to think about the topic of *attachment*, but also to give you a personal example to refer to as a means of recognizing the presence and influence of attachment in your own life as the discussion herein unfolds. The questions asked were a sampling of those found in the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) that has been widely used for attachment research over the last several decades (George et al., 1996). You may have been taken by surprise with the nature of some of the questions, which is intentional as the AAI questions were designed to "[surprise] the unconscious" (George et al., 1985, as cited in George et al., 1996, p. 3) into revealing itself, its contents and connections, and one's state of mind toward attachment (i.e., how one made sense of their early attachment experiences; Siegel, 2018a).[83] To address and understand such thoughts and feelings, they first need to be flushed out and brought to the surface because of how deeply embedded our experiences of attachment are within us.[84] With that, our early experiences of attachment are foundational, formative, and unconscious motivators that manifest in the ways we think about and relate to others, to ourselves, the world, and even to God.[85] To illustrate, consider how you

[83] This concept, and the research conducted using the AAI, will be discussed later in this chapter.

[84] Our experiences within the first 18 months of life are mostly, if not entirely, encoded in our unconscious implicit memory (Siegel, 2018b). For example, we do not remember learning to walk, but we did because we do, evidencing that an implicit memory model (and motor plan) exists. The AAI questions, therefore, make use of whatever explicit memory is available to activate the implicit memory models of attachment created unconsciously in the first 12-18 months of life.

[85] Recall that something similar was said to describe the effects of trauma near the end of the previous chapter: "But why linger long on childhood trauma resulting from relational injury? Because those children grow into adults whose foundations were unconsciously built upon trauma, and unbeknownst to them, the unresolved trauma has significantly informed their identities, their worldviews, how they relate to others, and how they respond to

answered the last question. Did you make any connections between who you are today and the influence of your early childhood relationships, especially that of your primary caregiver? While there are certainly connections to be made, thus serving to demonstrate how those early attachments were influential and formative, attachment does not end in childhood.

> Attachment is a lifelong process. We begin searching for attachment as soon as we are born. We seek to attach to our mother whose body we just left, and we often do so through nursing and being held closely for the first nine to 12 months of life. We then begin to walk and move away, quite literally, from our mother and towards others who have their arms outstretched to us. This process represents how we first begin to learn about attachment and connecting to others. When the person we are walking toward has their arms outstretched, we continue to move toward them. However, if that person does not have open arms, we shift the focus to someone who does, and this pattern continues for the rest of our lives. (Reese, 2018, p. 2)

If attachment is both deeply embedded and foundational, but also a "lifelong process," then what is the essence or meaning of attachment? Pediatric neuropsychiatrist Dan Siegel (2018a) defines attachment "as the relationship that gives you an inner sense of security," which is something we continually seek from the womb to the tomb.[86] To state what should be obvious, attachment occurs in relationship, and our attachment patterns (or behaviors), i.e., our ways of being with our self, others, the world, and even God, are formed in and through relationship, first gestationally with our birth mother, then through our primary caregiver (if not the birth mother),

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adversity." However, it is important to state here that, with both trauma and attachment, the effects and influences of each are not a fixed fate as trauma can be healed, as well as the effects from suboptimal experiences of attachment.

[86] As will be seen, not all relationships provide a sense of security and are thereby categorized as insecure attachments. However, the essential characteristic of attachment, and by which attachment is judged (i.e., categorized as secure or insecure) is the experience of safety and security in the relationship—with or without an associated affectional bond—and that is what we continually seek throughout our lifetime (Allen, 2013).

as well as other significant people in early childhood.[87] But what we sought to derive from those relationships, as well as what we continually seek in relationships today, is a sense of security (as well as meaning and identity) that not only helps us survive but also thrive (or flourish), and this is a lifelong endeavor. John Bowlby (1977), the British psychoanalyst who pioneered attachment theory, states

> attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in a person attempting or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser. Although it is most frequently and intensely displayed by infants and young children, it continues to be manifested throughout life, especially when distressed, ill, or afraid. (as cited in Ainsworth, 1985, p. 792)

To explain further, Bowlby (1988) states elsewhere:

> At other times the behaviour is less in evidence. Nevertheless, *for a person to know that an attachment figure is available and responsive gives him a strong and pervasive feeling of security* [emphasis added], and so encourages him to value and continue the relationship. Whilst attachment behaviour is at its most obvious in early childhood, it can be observed throughout the life cycle. . . . [I]t is seen in virtually all human beings (though in varying patterns), [and] is regarded as an integral part of human nature. (p. 27)

Therefore, if there is anything inherent in us from the moment we are born—and even before then while developing in the womb—it is our need to securely attach to another. We are seekers, first and foremost, seeking relationships that will provide security and, with it, an

[87] It is important to note we had no choice over our earliest relationships, and the attachment patterns we learned within the first 12-18 months were not learned by choice but rather in response to our relationships with our primary caregivers.

integrated and coherent sense of self. British pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1960) is famous for saying "'There is no such thing as an infant', meaning, of course, that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant" (p. 586, n. 4), which highlights our initial total dependence on another to form and shape who we are, as well as our continued interdependence on one another to sustain us throughout our lives. With that, at our healthiest we are connected yet differentiated people, which is contrary to the Western belief that we are, or should be, staunchly independent individuals; however, that cannot be because *we are relationship.* The African concept of *ubuntu* captures this well:

> The concept of *ubuntu* is an ethic based on the understanding that one's subjectivity is inextricably interlined with that of others in one's community. . . . *Ubuntu* is often associated with the concept of self "I am because we are," which stands in contrast to the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am." . . .
>
> It seems to me, however, that the meaning of *ubuntu* is best captured in the isiXhosa expression "Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu." Literally translated, this means, "A person is a person through being witnessed by, and engaging in reciprocal witnessing of other persons," or "A person becomes a human being through the multiplicity of relationships with others." (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016, p. 56)

In sum, it is relationship that has created and formed us, continually maintains and sustains us, and can serve to transform us throughout our lives—for good or for bad. The means by which relationship can bring about such formation and transformation are, I believe, best explained through attachment theory, which is robust and complex and, therefore, only what amounts to a

cursory yet pertinent overview will be offered to inform future discussion.[88]

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is situated near the end of a lengthy history of life span developmental theories, all of which sought to provide answers to such questions as who we humans are, what makes us do the things we do, and how we go about the process of growing, learning, maturing, and relating. Many may recall the more well-known developmental theorists such as Sigmund Freud with his psychosexual theory,[89] Jean Paiget's stages of cognitive development, or Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. What is notable is each theorist worked within a specific domain and context that influenced their own thinking and theories at the time,[90] and over the course of history we see a shift in influential paradigms from those that focused initially on behavior, then on the cognitive realm, then to integrating such factors as emotional, social, and cultural influences, and now the more recent developmental paradigms have shifted their hypotheses into the realm of relationality, such as with Bowlby and attachment theory co-founder, Mary Ainsworth (Broderick & Blewitt, 2015). These shifts over time also show an evolution in thought from humans being essentially no more than animals acting upon food and sex (or sin) drives, to the current realization that we are deeply relational beings, and it is that relational drive to securely connect to another that supersedes all others (Siegel, 2018c).[91]

Attachment theory became more well-known in the 1960s and has since increased in popularity (especially as it pertains to trauma), but its foundational research began in the 1930s

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[88] The reader is referred to Siegel's (2020), *The Developing Mind,* and Allen's (2013), *Mentalizing in the Development and Treatment of Attachment Trauma* for detailed and comprehensive explanations of attachment and attachment theory.

[89] Freud's contribution to our understanding of trauma was discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the early formation of his psychosexual theory.

[90] These theories serve as more examples of constructs (like sin, the doctrine of original sin, and trauma), each having histories, contexts, and personalities that informed their conceptualization.

[91] One might say that science is now able to prove what Scripture already revealed to us from the beginning, i.e., that relationship—loving God and loving others—is primary and essential for a flourishing life.

when clinicians began noticing the "ill effects of personality development" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 20) in children who had been institutionalized for prolonged periods of time, and/or had frequent changes in their primary caregiver.[92] Bowlby (1988) took over this investigation into the importance of maternal care in 1950, to which Ainsworth (1985) joined shortly thereafter as its primary researcher, and out of which attachment theory was conceived and developed more fully. It is worth briefly mentioning the robust research undergirding attachment theory, most of which has been carried out over the last 50 years with tens of thousands of infants, children, and adults worldwide, predominantly using either Ainsworth's (1988) "Strange Situation" experiment and/or the AAI referred to previously (Siegel, 2018b; 2018c).[93] There have also been long term studies, such as the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation (MLSRA), that have followed individuals from infancy through adulthood to assess the relative permanence and/or adaptability of attachment behaviors, and have provided a rich source of empirical knowledge about the power of relationships to either promote or hinder optimal brain development, as well as the future ability of individuals to relate, socialize, learn, and grow both cognitively and physically (Sroufe & Siegel, 2011). Furthermore, attachment research has been carried out in multiple countries and cultures to elucidate the fundamental and universal ways that parents (and people) all over the world connect to their children (and others), which shows that attachment theory is not a Western concept that only applies to Western culture, it has cross-cultural and global application (recall *ubuntu*; Siegel, 2018b, 2018c). Attachment and attachment behavior have been further substantiated by neurobiological and neurophysiological research that

[92] Recall this is a criterion for Developmental Trauma Disorder: "The child or adolescent has experienced . . . over a period of at least one year beginning in childhood or early adolescence . . . *[s]ignificant disruptions of protective caregiving as the result of repeated changes in primary caregiver* [emphasis added]; repeated separation from the primary caregiver; or exposure to severe and persistent emotional abuse" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 360).

[93] Video recorded examples of Ainsworth's "Strange Situation" experimental design can be found on YouTube, and the AAI protocol can also be found via a Google search, or via the link in the reference for George et al. (1996).

has mapped out the neurological pathways, i.e., our attachment system, that serves to create and sustain attachment bonds and behaviors that begin within the womb (Feldman, 2017; Siegel, 2020).[94] Lastly, attachment has also been shown to *not* depend on genetics or temperament, i.e., genetics and temperament are not predictive of nor causative of certain patterns of attachment (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2018b).[95] Given all this, hopefully it can be seen that attachment is not novel nor a concept that will fade in time, but rather it is quite the opposite: attachment (ergo, relationship) has been shown to be a primary and powerful influence in our lives, shaping and forming who we are, how we develop, and informing our way of being in the world (Allen, 2013; Badenoch, 2018; Siegel, 2018a).

Key Principles of Attachment

A vast amount of salient information can be drawn from attachment research, but only a few key principles will be highlighted for the reader to keep in mind for future discussion.

Humans Seek Secure Attachment

The most prominent principle already mentioned is that we are born into this world seeking and expecting a secure attachment, and we continue to seek secure attachment throughout our lifetime. At birth our attachment system—in fact, our entire nervous system—is activated and seeking a caregiver who is going to provide for our needs and give us the safety and security to develop, survive, and thrive in this strange, loud, bright, and confusing new world of sensations that we were just delivered into (Siegel, 2018b). Furthermore, being birthed from a safe, warm, and comfortable womb into a much colder and harshly stimulating world is

[94] The reader is referred to Siegel's (2020) *The Developing Mind,* and Badenoch's (2018) *The Heart of Trauma,* for deep dives into the neuroscience of attachment.

[95] To explain further, infants and children do have temperaments, but those temperaments do not change across relationships, i.e., temperament is a common denominator in all relationships. However, the infant or child can have different attachment patterns with different people (e.g., a secure attachment to the mother, and an insecure attachment with the father). Therefore, temperament is not predictive of infant attachment patterns (Siegel, 2018a)

traumatic in and of itself. "During birth, not only does the baby experience a broken connection, it experiences a loss of all comfort. . . [and] enters the world crying and screaming because of the attachment trauma he just experienced" (Reese, 2018, p. 14). It is a trauma because—as derived from the previous chapter's discussion—it is an unexpected event that is confusing, frightening, overwhelming, and well beyond the infant's developmental capacity to cope, thus needing the intervention of a parent to mitigate and integrate the experience, which is usually facilitated by a swift reunion of infant and mother with flesh to flesh contact that soothes the infant and repairs the broken connection, thus resolving the trauma and reestablishing what will hopefully become a secure attachment process.[96]

Attachment Influences Brain Development

At birth our midbrain is only partially developed and our cortex is a relative blank slate ready to be developed; therefore, we are utterly impressionable and dependent upon our experiences and relationships to finish brain development (Badenoch, 2018; Siegel, 2018b).[97] With that, the impact of relationships within the first year of life—and particularly the first few months (or even gestationally)[98]—simply cannot be overstated because attachment relationships have an organizing effect on an infant's behavior and brain, as Siegel (2020) explains:

> Attachment relationships are crucial in organizing not only ongoing experience, but also

[96] "Flesh to flesh contact that soothes" can also be understood as the mother's nervous system co-regulating the infant's nervous system. While we are boundaried in flesh, in reality relationships are one person's nervous system interacting with and responding to another person's nervous system, often below and before our conscious perceptions (Dana, 2018). Additionally, I refer the reader to *Romania's Abandoned Children: Deprivation, Brain Development, and the Struggle for Recovery* by Nelson, Fox & Zeanah, for a poignant example of what can happen when that broken connection remains, and the trauma remains unresolved.

[97] To be "utterly impressionable" means we are also, in theological terms, utterly corruptible.

[98] During the first few months billions of neurons are either being established and integrated or pruned off due to lack of use, all of which is facilitated by physical, sensational, and relational experiences—or lack thereof—and once neurons are pruned off, the result is permanent, i.e., a lost connection remains lost forever. Furthermore, connections are being established prior to birth, as Badenoch notes (2018): "From about the eighth month of gestation onward, our amygdala-centric pathways build up an implicit perceptual lens based on the quality of our interpersonal and cultural experience" (p. 134).

> the neuronal growth of the developing brain. In other words, these salient emotional relationships *have a direct effect on the development of the domains of mental functioning that serve as our conceptual anchor points: memory, narrative, emotion, representations, and states of mind* [emphasis added].
>
> Attachment relationships may serve to create the central foundation from which the mind develops" (Siegel, 2020, p. 168).

Therefore, our early relationships not only can, but do, form and shape who we are, and also what we come to think, believe, and learn about ourselves, others, and how the world operates, all of which is chiefly facilitated by our primary caregiver and the quality of attachment formed in that relationship (Badenoch, 2018; Siegel, 2018b, 2020).

Attachment is Formed With a Select Few

While we have a need for, and prefer, a primary caregiver to establish stability and consistency, attachments can and do occur with others, but only a select few. As Bowlby (1988) states:

> There is abundant evidence that almost every child habitually prefers one person, usually his mother-figure, [but] in her absence, he will make do with someone else, preferably someone whom he knows well. On these occasions most children show a clear hierarchy of preference so that, in extremity and with no one else available, even a kindly stranger may be approached. Thus, whilst attachment behaviour [e.g., proximity seeking] may in differing circumstances be shown to a variety of individuals, an enduring attachment, or attachment bond, is confined to very few. (p. 28)

Furthermore, a different attachment pattern (as will be explained shortly) can form with each individual person in a child's circle of influence (Siegel, 2018b), e.g., a secure attachment with

the mother, but an insecure attachment with the father. However, it is the attachment pattern with the primary caregiver that is most influential and formative.

Primary Attachments Become Internal Working Models

Our primary attachment in early life becomes an internal working model (or mental schema) that we tend to unconsciously draw upon in our daily functioning, and it also informs our behavior in relationships. This concept was at the heart of Bowlby's theory: "His idea was simple and powerful: The nature of an infant's attachment to the parent (or other primary caregiver) will become internalized as a working model of attachment" (Siegel, 2020, p. 172). As Siegel (2020) explains,

> the formation of mental models is a fundamental way in which implicit memory allows the mind to create generalizations and summaries of past experiences. One form of such a mental model is a "script" that serves as a blueprint for expected interpersonal patterns of behavior and communication. These models are then used to bias present cognition for more rapid analysis of an ongoing perception, and also to help the mind anticipate what events are likely to happen next. In this way, forming mental models is the essential manner in which the brain learns from the past and then directly influences the present and shapes future actions. (p. 172)

Van der Kolk (2014) restates this in simpler terms as such: "This information [from interactions with our primary caregiver] is embodied in the warp and woof of our brain circuitry and forms the template of how we think of ourselves and the world around us" (p. 129). Thus, the oft-repeated theme herein persists: implicit mental models created from our primary attachments inform how we perceive and think about self and others, how we are to relate to self and others (and by extension, God), and how the world works and our place within it.

Attachment is Formed by Seven Months and Well-Established by 12-18 Months

As previously mentioned, the process of forming attachment begins immediately (even from within the last trimester) and our earliest attachments are usually formed by the time we are seven months old, as evidenced by emerging and observable attachment behavior (e.g., preferring a specific caregiver; Badenoch, 2018; Siegel, 2020). Furthermore, based on the results from Strange Situation experiments, attachment patterns are found to be well-established by 12-18 months of age (Seigel, 2018b; 2020), which only further substantiates the impact and import of relationships within just the first year of life, as that is when foundations of behavior and thought are already being laid, and implicit internal working models are already being formed and becoming embodied.

Attachment is Not a Fixed Fate

Given the influence and impact of attachment on such things as infant brain development, identity formation, emotional regulation, and the development of internal working models within the first year of life, it may appear that attachment patterns and their formative effects are immutable—for good or for bad. Let it be understood that is *not* the case, attachment patterns and behaviors are not a fixed fate, and a "change to greater attachment security . . . always remains a possibility" (Allen, 2013, p. 165).[99] Van der Kolk (2014) adds: "These inner maps [i.e., internal working models] are remarkably stable across time. This doesn't mean, however, that our maps can't be modified by experience" (p. 129). Therefore, while not everyone will start out their lives experiencing secure attachment, it is what we will always seek, and it can always be earned (or learned) at any point in life (Siegel, 2018b); however, by contrast, secure

[99] By comparison, the Reformed view the sinful nature as immutable, which is a hopeless situation for those desiring true change and transformation. However, when understanding sinful behavior as part of a trauma response or the developmental effects of suboptimal or traumatic attachment, hope remains for change because healing, resolution, and transformation remain a possibility for those who seek it.

attachment can be disrupted and lost (e.g., through trauma or loss of relationship), and it will need to be regained. But research has established that secure attachment can be attained at any stage of life, either by it being corrected in early childhood, or learning and earning it in adolescence or adulthood (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2018b).

Attachment Classifications

As stated, it is the quality of relationship with the primary caregiver that determines the attachment pattern that will develop in an infant, and while the goal is to have secure attachment, insecure attachments also occur. This section provides an overview of the essential characteristics of each attachment classification and some implications for infant development.

Secure Attachment

To begin, the experience of a secure attachment is one of being *seen*, *soothed*, and *safe* (Siegel, 2018a). Notably, while we associate those terms with infants and children, we do not outgrow them, nor the pursuit of secure attachment; therefore, these are things we feel and desire as adults as well.

Being Seen. Being seen, or feeling seen, is based on our perception of the inner mental life of another person, i.e., we feel "felt" by that person and that they have an authentic and accurate perception of who we are in their mind (Siegel, 2018a). People who "see" us are present, attuned, and resonate with us and have a desire to connect with us, which conveys the following message to our self: "I am worthy to be seen, I matter, and I am accepted for who I am" (Siegel, 2018a). These messages are a part of how attachment creates in us a sense of self—which is something we carry into every relationship—and for those with secure attachment, there is an integrated and coherent sense of self, i.e., a sense of wholeness and peace that persists even amidst distressing situations (Siegel, 2018a).

Being Soothed. Being soothed means having a distressed state made better, which is a need throughout life, but within their first year infants need another person's connection to help calm their nervous system and restore peace (Siegel, 2018a). As children grow, they learn to calm themselves on their own, which they do by drawing on the secure internal mental model created from their primary attachment figure (Siegel, 2018a). However, the preference is still to seek proximity to a trusted other if available (this is true for adults as well), and in connecting with another it is easier to regulate our emotions and dissipate stress (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel, 2018a). The message to our self when being soothed is: "My needs are worthwhile and they are not a burden to others; I can express them freely and others will help meet them" (Siegel, 2018a). Therefore, in secure attachment we are allowed to unashamedly feel our emotional and physical needs and communicate those needs to others and have the reasonable expectation that they will be met (Siegel, 2018a).

Being Safe. Being safe is relatively easy to define: it is the *feeling* of being safe in the presence of another, which comes with a sense that person is for us, is trustworthy, and will help protect us in times of need, and, furthermore, they are not a source of fear or terror (Siegel, 2018a). To note, feeling safe comes from consistently *experiencing* safety with another, but also from *sensing* safety in another as our autonomic nervous system (ANS) unconsciously interacts with the ANS of another, which is termed *neuroception* and is "the way our autonomic nervous system scans for cues of safety, danger, and life-threat without involving the thinking parts of our brain" (Dana, 2018, p. 8). Hence, we can often sense someone is safe before we experience them to be safe. But inevitably, even safe people will be a source of relational injury or cause a relational breach; however, they seek to repair and restore it in a timely manner. The message to our self here is simple: "I am safe," which then translates into seeing our self as an equally safe

person (Siegel, 2018a).[100] This is more important than it may seem. First, safety is an inherent need for our nervous system,[101] which, as just described, is always scanning and assessing our external and internal environment while asking such questions as: "Is this person safe? Is this a safe situation? Am I safe?" Second, safety is linked to trust, which not only applies to others, but also to our self. As Herman (2015) states:

> The sense of safety in the world, or basic trust, is acquired in earliest life in the relationship with the first caretaker. Originating with life itself, this sense of trust sustains a person throughout the lifecycle. It forms the basis of all systems of relationship and faith. (p. 51)

Therefore, in a world full of threats, being able to feel safe and have an inherent sense of safety and trust within ourselves—without doubts and fears ruling us—is crucial (Siegel, 2018a). It moves us out of fight, flight or freeze responses and rigidity into one of openness, vulnerability, compassion, and empathy towards others (Siegel, 2018a).

Those three core characteristics of secure attachment—being seen, soothed, and safe—are engendered in a relationship characterized by *contingent communication*, which has emerged as *the key universal finding* from attachment research worldwide and across all cultures (Siegel, 2018c). Contingent communication is important throughout the lifespan, and can be explained as a person first receiving a communication from another (i.e., being present and attuned to the other), then accurately interpreting that communication (i.e., thinking about what is being said, asked, or needed by the other), and then responding to the communication in an expeditious manner (e.g., meeting the need being communicated by the other; Siegel, 2018a, 2018c). To

[100] To clarify, this is more than feeling protected and safe from threat, which does apply, but in terms of a sense of self it means: "I am a safe and trustworthy person, too."
[101] Safety is also a critical need for healing from trauma; without a sense of safety, therapeutic efforts will be thwarted (Herman, 2015).

illustrate using a parent-infant scenario, in hearing an infant's cry of distress, the parent is present and attuned enough to perceive if it means the infant is hungry, needing a diaper change, or is otherwise uncomfortable or upset, and then the parent responds accordingly. In sum, the communication offered by the infant resonates with the parent who responds in a timely manner, accurately assesses the need, and then adequately meets the need (Siegel, 2018a). But, if the parent misinterprets the communication and the infant's need has not yet been met (as evidenced by continued signs of distress), then the parent reassesses the infant's needs while remaining calm, attuned, and present, and, furthermore, repairs the misstep by responding again in a more accurate way that meets the infant's need (Siegel, 2018a). If successful, the infant becomes satisfied and has experienced being seen, soothed, and/or made safe by the parent. As all parents know, there is a learning curve early on, but staying present, consistent, attuned, responsive, and reparative of relational breaches will establish and maintain a secure attachment between infant and parent (or primary caregiver).

In summary, in a secure attachment the infant has a sense of being seen, soothed, and safe, because the parent is sensitive to the infant and in synchrony with the infant's communication and needs, which develops a secure mental model (i.e., an internal working model) in the mind of the infant of the caregiver as someone who will provide them with a *secure base* and *safe haven* (Siegel, 2018c), as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Circle of Security

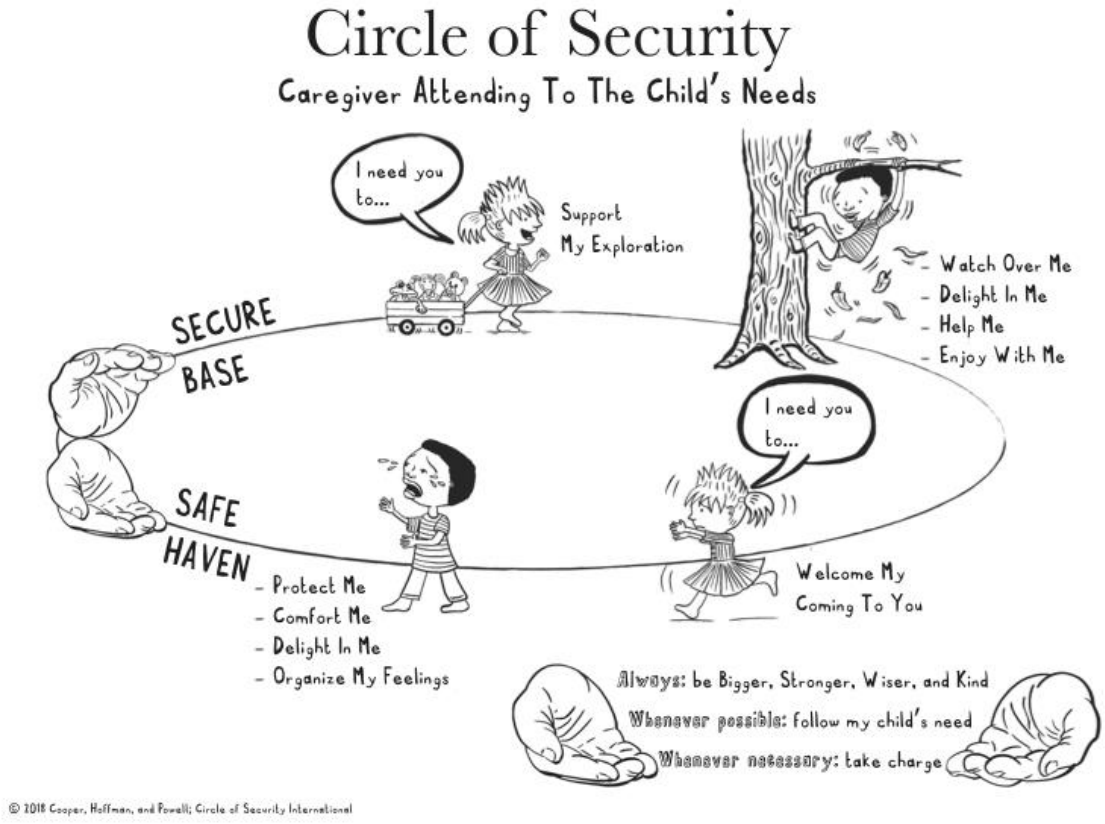

Figure 2 is a visual provided by Circle of Security International (2016) to help explain the concept of being a secure base and a safe haven for an infant (or child in this depiction). When a parent is a secure base, a child can launch off into the world to explore and play freely, trusting the parent is watching them, delighting in them, and enjoying them. However, as with older children, if the parent is not present the child still has an internal working model of that secure base, which gives them the confidence to explore their world and pursue their desired activities on their own. In being a safe haven, children of any age (even into adulthood) will know that if they need help, are in distress, or are overstimulated and in need of rest, they can return to the

parent knowing they will be welcomed in their return, protected, comforted, or soothed as needed, and helped to organize their thoughts and feelings, all of which prepares them to launch off into the world again. It is important to note that while we are referring to this concept within the parent-child relationship, it also applies to all secure relationships between adults and children, as well as within reciprocating adult relationships and partnerships, and probably most importantly, in our relationship with God, who is to be our ultimate secure base and safe haven. But, as stated previously, secure attachment may not be (or ever have been) the experience for some.

Insecure Attachment

Secure attachment is the ideal and the goal, and research shows that 55-65% of infants in the non-clinical U.S. population demonstrate secure attachment to their parents (Siegel, 2020). The remainder of the population thus experiences and demonstrates insecure attachment, which is primarily divided into two other classifications: *avoidant* attachment, which represents 20-30% of infants, and *ambivalent* attachment, which represents 5-15% of infants (Siegel, 2020). However, a fourth classification was created during the initial research phases as researchers were seeing inconsistent and often bizarre behaviors in some infants that did not fit neatly into the other classifications' organized patterns of behavior, even though the infants did display some behaviors that corresponded to one of the other three patterns. As a result, the classification of *disorganized* attachment was created, which is currently seen in 20-40% of infants in the non-clinical U.S. population and was found to be associated with unresolved trauma and loss in the parents, as well as maltreatment of the infant; furthermore, in cases of known maltreatment the percentage of infants with disorganized attachment increases to 70% (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020). Notably, the disorganized classification does not stand alone but is considered a superimposition

of attachment trauma responses on one of the other three organized patterns (Allen, 2013).[102] Therefore, the disorganized classification carries with it either *secure*, *avoidant*, or *ambivalent* as a secondary or sub-classification, e.g., *disorganized-ambivalent* attachment, to reflect the other primary pattern observed during the Strange Situation experiment. Each of these insecure classifications will be considered in more detail below.

Avoidant Attachment. Avoidant attachment results from the parent *consistently* not receiving or responding to communication attempts from the infant, i.e., there is a consistent lack of contingent communication (Siegel, 2018c). For example, the infant cries out and is ignored, neglected, or met with an uncaring and insensitive attitude; however, this is not a one time or occasional event, but a repeated and consistent pattern of noncontingent and/or insensitive communication with an absence of repair. The infant then learns that the parent will not see, soothe, attune to or connect with them, and with the consistently unmet expectations and unfulfilled needs, the infant creates an internal working model from those parental patterns of behavior and adapts accordingly (Siegel, 2018c).

Since the infant has ascertained their needs will go unmet, their effective strategy is to disconnect from the sensations and feelings associated with those needs to assuage the pain, disappointment, and distress caused by having their needs go unfulfilled; furthermore, the infant also disconnects from the parent (Siegel, 2018c). The attachment system that naturally seeks proximity to others dampens in response or even shuts down in this state of chronic insensitivity

[102] To explain further, the other primary classifications are observed as having organized patterns of behavior, i.e., reflecting consistent strategies of relating to their primary caregiver. For those with disorganized attachment, those primary patterns of behavior would be interrupted by conflicting behavior, e.g., approaching yet avoiding, freezing, or collapsing into confusion, which are, therefore, seen as disorganized patterns of behavior (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2018c). Furthermore, research has shown the disruptive behavior need not be frequent but instead only occasional or slight, as Allen (2013) explains: “Amazingly, [just] a brief episode of anomalous behavior can be indicative of serious trouble in the attachment relationship as well as forecasting significant developmental problems—even into adulthood” (p. 166).

and noncontingent communication from the parent (Siegel, 2018c). These infants then become the children and adults who do not need anyone; they do not ask for help or express their needs, and instead may control people (rather than engage in healthy, reciprocating relationships) to get their needs met through others (Siegel, 2018c). Because we were created to connect, those longings and needs that go unfulfilled are also painful and frustrating, so to conserve resources and energy these people learned early on to emotionally shut down; therefore, they tend to not feel anything or express many feelings (Siegel, 2018c).

While there are many potential messages from this attachment experience, some of the most poignant are: "My needs are not important. I am not worth being seen. I do not deserve to have my needs met. Something is wrong with me" (Siegel, 2018c). The lattermost message comes from the mind of a child who cannot fathom that the problem lies with the parent—they cannot rationalize as such—so it must be the child's fault, i.e., they are the problem (Herman, 2015). This can promote a deep sense of shame, which is another feeling that gets suppressed along with the others. Lastly, as it pertains to the development of a sense of self, in avoidant attachment the child becomes disconnected from themselves (and others) as they disconnect from all their feelings, longings, and needs (Siegel, 2018c).

Ambivalent Attachment. In ambivalent attachment the parent is very inconsistent with contingent communication, i.e., sometimes the infant's needs are met, sometimes they are not. At other times there may be intrusive messages of fear and anxiety brought to the infant, which can occur when the parent's own insecurities are activated in response to the infant's communication of needs, and this creates confusion for the infant who is on the receiving end of that fear and anxiety (Siegel, 2018c). Given that our brains are impressionable and malleable from birth, these anxious and fearful states from the parent get absorbed into the infant's developing brain via

mirror neurons, which then create an anxious or fearful state within the infant, as well as confusion (Siegel, 2018c). For example, if a cry of hunger is met with fear and anxiety from the parent, those hunger pangs become associated in that moment with fear and anxiety in the infant, which is confusing, especially if at other times those cries of hunger were met with contingent communication and their hunger was satiated (Siegel, 2018c). Furthermore, given all the inconsistent responses, the infant can begin to conflate hunger pangs with anxiety, which can cause them to question their ability to know what they need and feel, e.g., "Am I really hungry or am I just anxious about something?" (Siegel, 2018c) Therefore, in ambivalent attachment the infant has the experience of sometimes being seen, sometimes being soothed, but other times not and instead intruded upon with the overwhelming feelings of the parent, which then raises the question of whether the infant can rely on this relationship (Siegel, 2018c).

Given the ambivalence and confusion within the relationship between parent and infant, there can be multiple messages given to the self, such as: "I must live with fear, anxiety, and doubt. I cannot be certain of anything. I cannot trust myself to know what I think, feel, or need" (Siegel, 2018c). These are infants who grow into children (and adults) who are unsure of themselves, as they are filled with self-doubt and uncertain of their own abilities, feelings, or needs, and as a result they may ask for help or support when they really do not need it (Siegel, 2018c). This naturally leads to a sense of self that is confused, and with that they can wonder (as with avoidant children) if there is something wrong with them, which results in being filled with shame. However, instead of suppressing shame, the ambivalent child may become consumed by the overwhelming feelings and how to manage them, which cycles them into more fear, doubt, and confusion (Siegel, 2018c).[103]

[103] Siegel (2018c) notes that the attachment system in ambivalent infants and children is highly activated, in contrast to their avoidant counterparts that have a dampened or inactive attachment system. The overactive ambivalent

Disorganized Attachment. In disorganized attachment, the parents in many cases truly love the infant, and may even be responsive and sensitive some of the time, but "[t]he central theme in disorganized attachment is *fear of the parent*," (Allen, 2013, p. 168) engendered by some form of frightening behavior from the parent (Siegel, 2018c).[104] Furthermore, this is frank attachment trauma (Allen, 2013).[105] Examples of the frightening and traumatizing behavior can be verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, overt neglect, or any kind of threatening behavior (as perceived by the infant), all of which can create a state of terror within the infant (Siegel, 2018c). "Being afraid of a parent puts the infant in an intolerable dilemma . . . characterized as *fright without solution*. (Allen, 2013, p. 168), i.e., the infant wants or needs to go to the parent for help, but it is the parent who is also the source of fear and terror, which is traumatizing as the infant is left alone and unsupported in a confusing and terrifying situation.[106] In these situations, two brain circuits are activated simultaneously in the infant, i.e., one telling the infant to get away from danger and another to move toward the safety and protection of their primary attachment figure, which cannot be reconciled as the parent is the common denominator in both pathways (Siegel, 2018a). Since the infant cannot do both (i.e., simultaneously move toward and away from the parent), nor rationalize and think through the situation like an adult, it creates an unsolvable and intolerable situation that results in fragmentation, usually seen as dissociation, which is a psychological splitting off from the experience (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2018c). Furthermore "[i]n these dyadic [i.e., parent-infant] situations, the child has the double trauma of experiencing

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attachment system contributes to their becoming consumed by overwhelming feelings and seeking help and guidance from others often instead of trusting themselves to think and act on their own.

[104] To note, due to the inconsistency and vacillation between contingent communication and frightening behavior, disorganized attachment has been found to be highly correlated with ambivalent attachment (Siegel, 2018c).

[105] It is interesting to consider if the early attachment researchers would have used the term *trauma* in their findings if trauma had been understood as we define it today. *Attachment trauma* is being seen more in the literature as of late, coinciding with the evolution of our understanding of trauma.

[106] Allen (2013) emphasizes this repeatedly in his work: "the prototype of traumatizing experience is being afraid and psychologically alone" (p. 19); in sum, being alone and afraid is traumatizing.

terrifying events and the loss of a trusted attachment figure" (Siegel, 2020, p. 219).

These infants also often live with some degree of adverse childhood experiences and trauma spoken of in the previous chapter, and research shows these infants usually have—without intervention— significant developmental and/or mental health issues as they grow into adulthood (Allen, 2013; Burke Harris, 2018). Furthermore, recall that 70% of infants who suffer parental maltreatment have disorganized attachment. In this unfortunately large population, the messages to self are highly variable and contingent upon the particular dynamics within the parent-infant relationship, but assuredly include the insecure messages described previously, and any others are invariably negative and/or destructive to self. Given their experiences of psychological distress and fragmentation, the infant's sense of self is also fragmented (Siegel, 2018a). In some cases, these infants simply go into survival mode, and those adaptations can be seen as early as one year of age, consistent with all other attachment research from the Strange Situation experiment (Siegel, 2018a).

The Hope of Secure Attachment

It is important to pause here at the end of the insecure attachment classifications to reiterate a key principle of attachment. While it would seem those who did not have the experience of secure attachment as infants are in hopeless situations, that is fortunately *not* true. There is hope for change, healing, and transformation because our nervous systems, and therefore our attachment systems, are still able to adapt given a measure of safety and a new set of circumstances and relationships to learn from and grow within, which is good news (and part of the good news of the gospel). In considering the questions asked at the outset that drew upon your own attachment history and experiences, know that nothing is set in stone, which (to reiterate) is also true for people who experienced—or currently experience—secure attachment.

It is possible to lose secure attachment if life becomes filled with adverse circumstances, trauma, loss, or abusive (or otherwise unhealthy) relationships. However, even that can be changed, and secure attachment reclaimed, which is a concept called *earned* (or learned) *security* (Siegel, 2018b). Therefore, even if someone had suboptimal attachment experiences as an infant, security can still be attained at any time thereafter, and with it all the benefits of secure attachment discussed above.

The Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI)

While the focus of the attachment discussion thus far has been on infant attachment, there was repeated reference made to the important influence of the other person in the attachment relationship, i.e., the parent, or primary caregiver. Aside from temperament, which has been shown to not predict or cause the different patterns of attachment, there is little to nothing else the infant brings to the relationship that would influence attachment outcome; therefore, it is the parent that brings into the relationship the influential and determining factors, primarily through their pattern of behavior with the infant.

After Mary Ainsworth completed her initial infant attachment research using the Strange Situation experiment, Mary Main, as a graduate student, came to work with Ainsworth and began to "[pursue] the question of why parents act in such distinctly different patterns with their children" (Siegel, 2020, p. 180), i.e., the patterns that result in the different infant attachment classifications. To do so, Main, with Carol George and Nancy Kaplan, developed a set of questions for parents that eventually became the AAI research instrument, which "is a structured, semi-clinical interview focusing upon early attachment experiences and their effects" (George et al., 1996, p. 3). As evidenced by the opening prompts and questions in the introduction to this chapter, the intent is to draw out the implicit memories of the parent's early attachment

experiences through the use of explicit memory recall, or as was stated, to "surprise the unconscious" into revealing itself. Just like with the Strange Situation for infants, "the AAI is designed to evaluate attachment security in the context of emotional stress—where attachment counts. That is, the interview questions have the potential to evoke painful memories and strong emotions" (Allen, 2013, p. 94), which serve to reveal implicit states of mind.

Extensive research has been carried out (worldwide and across cultures) using the AAI with parents whose infants have participated in the Strange Situation experiment.[107] After the 20-question interview with a parent (i.e., the primary caregiver) is completed, it is transcribed and linguistically analyzed to ascertain the parent's probable attachment experience with their own parents (each one individually), as well as to ascertain the parent's current state of mind regarding those attachment experiences (George et al., 1996, p. 4), i.e., "a particular organizational pattern or engrained state of mind" (Siegel, 2020, p. 180) that the parent has in regard to their attachment experiences at the time of the interview. In analyzing and judging the results, parents are considered "secure with respect to their attachment histories if they appear to be *valuing of attachment, yet apparently objective in discussing any particular relationship or experience,* and insecure if they appear either *dismissing of,* or *preoccupied by* early attachment relationships and experiences" (George et al., 1996, pp. 4-5). AAI classifications are briefly summarized in Table 2.

[107] The research also included *expectant* parents, and their results were correlated with that of their infant in the Strange Situation performed when they reached 12-18 months of age. The results were essentially the same as that of parents who already had children.

Table 2

AAI Classifications and Parent State of Mind Regarding Attachment

AAI Classification[108]	Parent State of Mind Regarding Attachment
Secure	The parent demonstrates coherence and consistency in their narrative, is emotionally engaged, objective, and at ease discussing relationships, events, and their attachment history, and evidence they value attachment (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020). "The minds of such individuals can be described as having an organized and unimpaired flow of energy and information" (Siegel, 2020, p. 202).
Dismissing	The parent is not coherent in their narrative, is brief, states facts, is emotionally disengaged, and is dismissive and devaluing of attachment relationships and experiences (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020).
Preoccupied	The parent is not coherent in their narrative and becomes preoccupied with past experiences or attachment relationships, offering too many details or being vague and rambling; furthermore, they are uneasy discussing their attachment history and can appear angry or fearful (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020)
Unresolved	The parent has episodes of frank incoherence:[109] "During discussions of

[108] To note, in concert with infant attachment patterns, research shows that neither the genetics nor personality of the parent are predictive of their resultant AAI classification.

[109] This incoherence in a parent resulting from unresolved trauma is analogous to the disruptive behavior resulting from unresolved trauma that interrupts an organized attachment pattern in infants. With that, the subclassification of

	loss or abuse, individual shows striking lapse in the monitoring of reasoning and discourse" (Siegel, 2020, p. 175), indicating unresolved attachment trauma (Allen, 2013).

What emerged from the research using the AAI was that "a parent's pattern of narrating the 'story'" (Siegel, 2020, p. 180) of their early attachment experiences correlated with their infant's attachment classification as determined in the Strange Situation experiment. The correlations across studies were robust—between 75-85% correlation—thus demonstrating powerful predictive value, i.e., the primary caregiving parent's state of mind regarding attachment is highly predictive of the resultant attachment pattern that will be seen in their infant. With that, a parent with a *secure* state of mind regarding attachment correlated with having an infant with *secure* attachment, and the insecure patterns followed accordingly: a *dismissing* state of mind correlated with *avoidant* attachment, a *preoccupied* state of mind correlated with *ambivalent* attachment, and an *unresolved* state of mind correlated with *disorganized* attachment, which is due to unresolved attachment trauma in both the parent and the infant (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020). Therefore, the primary caregiving parent's pattern of behavior has enormous influence on their infant's resultant attachment pattern and all of the implications therein, e.g., infant brain development, emotional regulation, internal working models, and sense of self, all of which lay the foundations for how the infant will develop, grow and come to live and move and have their being in the world, for they are their parent's offspring (cf. Acts 17:28).

The Hope of Secure Attachment: A Reprise

secure, *dismissing*, and *preoccupied* are added to the parent's AAI classification, e.g., *unresolved-preoccupied* (Allen, 2013).

It is important to pause once again to reiterate that one's early attachment pattern is not a fixed fate, even if it may appear that way as life carries on and behavior patterns persist. While research has shown those patterns can and do endure over time (and can be passed on), they can also change given new circumstances, relationships, and personally working to bring about desired change (Allen, 2013; Siegel, 2020). For those adults with suboptimal attachment experiences as an infant, and/or a current suboptimal state of mind towards attachment, security can still be learned and earned for those who seek it out. With earned security one reaps all the benefits of secure attachment discussed earlier, to include the added benefit of preventing those experiences from being passed on to the next generation, which has been substantiated by the research using the AAI.

> An informal subset of secure/autonomous adults consists of those with an "earned" secure/autonomous status. These are individuals whose described experiences of childhood would have been likely to produce some form of insecure attachment (avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized). However, the coherence of their transcripts reveals a fluidity in their narratives and a flexibility in their reflective capacity, so that their present state of mind with respect to attachment is rated as secure/autonomous. From information contained within their AAI narratives, these individuals often appear to have had a significant emotional relationship with a close friend, romantic partner, or therapist, which has allowed them to develop out of an insecure status and into a secure/autonomous AAI status. In studies comparing "earned" secure/autonomous, "continuous" secure/autonomous, and insecure parents, several findings emerge.
>
> One overall finding is that *the attachment of children to parents in the "earned" and "continuous" secure/autonomous categories appears to be indistinguishable*

> [emphasis added]. When parent–child interactions were assessed, even under conditions of significant stress, these two groups were similar to one another. This may be a limitation of the present assessment measures, or an illumination of the ways in which one can significantly alter present functioning even in the face of difficult childhood experiences that resulted in earlier insecurity. (Siegel, 2020, pp. 202-203)

While Siegel (2020) is providing a necessary research caveat in his text, he is much more emphatic (as am I) about the importance of this finding and its implications when he teaches:

> [T]he AAI is a research instrument that establishes an empirical basis for saying that it is never too late to make sense of your past and liberate yourself from the prison of suboptimal experiences. This is a hugely important research finding [that the researchers were not looking for, but] what they found was that the experience of making sense of your life can free you so that instead of passing onto the next generation these difficult experiences that you had, the 'making sense' process stops the transgenerational passage of suboptimal attachment. To me, this is such a huge, huge contribution . . . to give us, in clinical work and in parenting, such a profoundly important, and in some ways, revolutionary research finding. . . . This is hard, statistically proven, peer-reviewed, published findings that show that making sense of your life makes sense to do. (Siegel, 2018)[110]

Conclusion

Humans are conceived in relationship, and begin to grow and develop in relationship even before being birthed into the world. The relational (and physical) connection between baby and mother is broken in the process and trauma of birth, activating the baby's nervous system in

[110] The website for Siegel's (2018b) course has changed since I took it, and I no longer have access to retrieve precise timestamps, but these statements should be heard at approximately 01:05:00 or shortly thereafter.

new and exciting but also distressing ways, to which the activated and alert baby's natural response is to cry and flail. Thrust into an unexpected experience of overwhelming sensations previously unknown, the baby's attachment system desperately needs and seeks (re)connection with the mother to be seen, soothed, and made safe, thus mitigating the trauma, repairing the connection, and restoring relationship. Thus begins the process of human attachment and formation.

As has been shown in this chapter, the quality of attachment (and subsequent human formation) is largely dependent upon the pattern of behavior the parent, or primary caregiver, demonstrates with and toward the infant. If that pattern of behavior is marked by consistency, contingent communication, and reparations when relational breaches occur, then secure attachment will be experienced by the infant. The infant will experience being seen, soothed, and safe, will develop an internal working model of the primary caregiver as one who is trustworthy and a safe haven and secure base, and the infant's developing sense of self will be coherent and buttressed by positive cognitions about themself. If the pattern of behavior from the primary caregiver is routinely inconsistent, intrusive, lacking in contingent communication, or even traumatizing, then the infant will experience one of various insecure attachments (avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized), which negatively impacts brain development and relational dynamics, and engenders negative cognitions leading to a suboptimal sense of self and way of being in the world. All of these foundational and formative elements are stored in the infant's implicit memory, being formed as early as seven months of age, and becoming well-established by 12-18 months of age. If their experiences in life do not disrupt or change those initial attachment patterns, whether they are secure or insecure, then they will get passed on transgenerationally.

It is important to note the presence and impact of trauma in the attachment experience of an infant, i.e., attachment trauma. It is interesting to consider if the early attachment researchers would have used the term *trauma* in their findings if trauma had been understood then as we understand it today, as *attachment trauma* is being seen more in the literature as of late, and notably coinciding with our unfolding understanding of trauma.[111] Trauma was discussed as a significant factor in infant disorganized attachment, as well as for adults having a disorganized state of mind regarding attachment. However, I contend (with supportive research) that trauma is also experienced in avoidant and ambivalent attachment patterns as well, albeit it not as frankly as in disorganized attachment. If we consider trauma to be (as I stated earlier) "an unexpected event that is confusing, frightening, overwhelming, and well beyond the infant's developmental capacity to cope, thus needing the intervention of a parent to mitigate and integrate the experience," then infants experiencing avoidant and ambivalent attachment patterns are experiencing trauma. In brief, and as presented, when an infant experiences inconsistent or a complete lack of contingent communication, or experiences the intrusion of the parent's anxiety and fear in their interactions, it is confusing, distressing, and/or frightening to the infant who is unable to make sense of the experience; therefore, those experiences are, by nature, traumatizing. Allen (2013) notes "recent attachment research has shown that [these] ordinary ubiquitous psychological disconnections can be traumatic" (p. 11). Without reparative efforts from the parent to mitigate that trauma, it becomes internalized, embodied, and adapted to, resulting in the avoidant or ambivalent attachment patterns seen in the infant. Some may be familiar with the colloquialism "little-t traumas and big-t traumas," and as it pertains to attachment patterns,

[111] Google's Ngram Viewer is an online tool that searches the frequency of a word or phrase used in a particular corpus of printed sources between 1500 and 2019 (currently). With that, according to the Google Ngram Viewer, the term *attachment trauma* did not appear in English printed sources until after 1980 (notably when the DSM accepted PTSD as a valid diagnosis), after which it rose in frequency, peaking in 2012. See here: https://bit.ly/3wVs9zo

infants with avoidant or ambivalent attachment experienced little-t traumas, and infants with disorganized attachment experienced both little-t and big-t traumas—but all of it is trauma that needs healing and resolution. Furthermore, even infants with secure attachment likely experienced little-t traumas that were either readily repaired, or were few and far between so as to be overshadowed by their prevailing secure attachment experiences; however, even secure infants and adults will invariably have some unresolved trauma that may or may not reveal itself in stressful or reminiscent situations later in life. Therefore, trauma, within the context of attachment, plays a significant role in shaping and forming us.

Lastly, two themes were repeatedly emphasized throughout the discussion. First, our attachment experiences as an infant were foundational, formative, and informative of the ways we think about, perceive, and relate to our self, others, the world, and even God. Second, those attachment experiences did not and do not determine our fate because they are capable of being changed, for good or for bad. However, as the adage goes, "it's not how you start, it's how you finish," which is important to bear in mind if someone had insecure attachment experiences as an infant, or lost security due to life experiences (e.g., trauma and loss). There is always hope for change because, as Siegel (2018b) is fond of saying, we can make sense of our past experiences and learn and earn security at any point in time. This concept will be revisited in the concluding chapter, but for now we will turn our attention to the "original" attachment experience of humanity.

Chapter 5: Revisiting the Garden, Act One

Dr. Leonard Sweet is an American theologian, church historian, semiotician, prolific author, and, for a couple of semesters during my doctoral studies, he was also my professor. During one class session he was expounding on reading the Bible relationally, which is a hermeneutic not readily or widely applied within Western Christianity, as we tend to read the text propositionally and not relationally (Sweet, 2009). However, doing so gives us the opportunity to change or enlarge our understanding of stories we are accustomed to viewing from only one frame of reference or traditional interpretation. Such a method of reading is not only in concert with the inherent relationality (triunity) of God and God with us, but it allows us to ask: what else is happening in the story? What else can be gleaned from the text that can inform a better understanding of God, of ourselves, and our relationship with God, self, others, and creation?

As an example, Sweet referenced (and had written about previously) the *akedah,* or the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22, which is often viewed by Christians through the traditional lens of substitutionary sacrifice and/or as a test of obedience to God. But from the purview of some ancient rabbis, Abraham was given two tests: an obedience test and a relationship test, of which he passed the former but failed the latter (Sweet, 2004). Abraham obeyed the command to sacrifice Isaac but did not engage God on the matter, such as he did when vying for the lives of those in Sodom (see Gen. 18:16-33), i.e., he fought for the lives of strangers but not for the life of his own son. Furthermore, Abraham would have been justified in questioning God, who was (and is) utterly other-than (i.e., holy) and set apart from all other gods, such as those of the Ancient Near East that demanded sacrifice for appeasement and with which Abraham would have been familiar. So when Abraham hears: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you

love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you" (*NRSVue*, 2022, Genesis 22:2), he should have at least thought such a command was not in accord with the character of God with whom he was in covenant relationship—yet it was very much in accord with Molech (see Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5). Several questions then come to mind: Was Abraham hearing God correctly, or was he hearing some thing or someone else calling out from the cultural milieu? Would it not have been prudent to ask God about the offering to get clarification? Or was God stating it to invite the question and test Abraham's understanding of God? With that, was the test really one of "will you obey me?", or was it, "do you *know* me?" and "can you discern and hear my voice among others?" Or, furthermore, "are you willing to wrestle with me on this?" (Such as Jacob would later.) As Sweet (2004) puts it: "God created us for two-way conversations—for full-blown, no-holds-barred conversations. God wants us to be fully engaged in the exchange" (p. 54), but Abraham failed to do that.

> Abraham's silence in the face of an outrageous command from God signals a failure of relationship on his part. If you give up the struggle of discernment and hearing, you are not in right relationship with God. If obedience does not take place in the context of a relationship, no matter how tumultuous the relationship, it is not true obedience. In fact, if obedience is rightly understood, it may be that Abraham didn't even do so well on [the obedience test] either. (Sweet, 2004, p. 53)

Sweet (2004) discussed several layers of relational failure, e.g., with God, Isaac, and Sarah, as well as what it might have looked like to question and appeal to God and fight for his son's life while still walking in obedience up the mountain. Abraham's story, in part, demonstrates "[t]here is a world of difference between superficial obedience and substantive relationship, between

obeying orders and doing the right thing. . . . What God wants from us, even more than our obedience, is our *relationship*" (p. 53).

Dr. Sweet's discussion on the *akedah* was offered as an example of what is forthcoming, and to open the mind to seeing biblical stories from a deeply relational standpoint. The Bible is not meant to be mined for propositions to live by or laws to live under, but rather it is to be read as the story it is—a story we are called to find ourselves within and live out of. Most importantly, it is to be read as a means of coming to know and relate to God who wants us to live life *with* him in an intimate, healing, restorative, fulfilling, and enlivening relationship. Such a life is not found in following propositions or laws, but only by following and engaging with the person of Jesus. The devout Pharisees and scribes followed and built their lives around the former and missed Jesus, the one Torah was pointing to all along (as discussed in chapter 2). May we not make the same mistake.

Genesis 2: Establishing the Relational Foundations of Humanity

All of Scripture is telling a story, and as I see it, it is a story of a people coming to understand their God and who they are in relation to that God, and that story begins in Genesis 1 and finds its denouement in Jesus. We do an injustice to that story when we fail to begin at its proper beginning, and then dissect the text to such a degree that the story gets lost in the process. Furthermore, theology done by prooftexts and pericopes that have been dissected out of their context is, at best, lacking, and, at worst, harmful or dangerous. In doing so, we end up missing or forgetting about the larger story being told, or worse, we rewrite the story based on those prooftexts, pericopes, and, most notably, our interpretation of them that is often heavily informed by our experiences, traditions, and cultural milieu. With that, what one may claim is sound exegesis can turn out to be eisegesis; however, exegesis proper is likely a rarity, as Anderson

(2001) explains:

> Those who work in the history of interpretation from the patristic or medievalist angle rarely see their authors engaging in interpretation proper. Rather this interpreter or that is doing what he or she does because of some contemporary (generally polemical) circumstance.[112] Gregory of Nyssa, for example, waxes eloquent on Adam and Eve's chaste state in the Garden not because it is a biblical issue but because the fourth-century church values celibacy. What looks like exegesis (teasing meaning *out* of the text) is really just *eisogesis* [*sic*] (forcing one's pet theories *into* the text). (p. xvi)

So, in many ways we see in the text what we want to see, need to see, or are led to see, especially given our varying contexts and *Sitz im Leben*; however, that does not mean all those instances are not consonant with Jesus (or the Torah); nevertheless, they should be. The Torah is said to have 70 facets (or faces), so one interpreter can find deep truth in one facet while another interpreter finds deep truth in another, or multiple interpreters can all gaze upon a singular facet and each see something different from their respective angles, yet it is all part of the beauty and fullness of truth found in the Torah. Furthermore, as the reception history has shown, how a text was interpreted by its original audience is not its fixed and final meaning for all times, places, and cultures (Carter, 2006).[113] Indeed,

> "...it is illusory to imagine that a story or narrative presents us with only a monolithic meaning. . . . the search for the transparent literal meaning of a text leaves aside its traditional mysterious power, and that 'the meaning of a story cannot be posited anymore

[112] One can argue this is what Augustine and others were doing, and many continue to do, to substantiate the doctrine of original sin amidst challenges.

[113] However, recall from the Introduction that the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics advocates for one meaning: "We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed" (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1982, Article VII).

than can the glitter of a jewel"“ (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 275).

Therefore, instead of arguing that one facet represents the whole, or positing there is only one correct angle from which to view it, let us consider turning the diamond to capture all its beauty and truth, and perhaps see things anew.

Given all that, while the Fall narrative (Genesis 3:1-13) may be where many have begun (and often end) their argument for original sin, e.g., Martin Luther (Kolb 2014), it is not where our discussion will begin, because that would be dissecting the text from its larger context, and also picking up the story in its second act. The “second story of creation [. . . is a] drama in prose narrative [appearing] in two acts that take place in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:4b-25 and Gen. 3:1-24)” (O'Connor, 2018, p. 45).[114] With that, in this chapter we will observe the first act of that drama, which is where the story of humanity begins in earnest after God's grand act of creating the cosmos and everything in it as told in Genesis 1. Furthermore, as already alluded to at the outset, the text will be read and interpreted primarily through a relational lens, thus allowing us to view this facet of the Torah from a different perspective and see it anew.

The translation being used in this chapter and the next (where we will pick up the second act in Genesis 3) comes from American Jewish scholar and Hebrew Bible translator, Everett Fox (1995), which is a translation well-known to Jews, but would not be for most Christians. Using a lesser-known translation allows for this very familiar story to perhaps be read again for the first time. The epigraph Fox (1995) chose for his preface, adapted from a lecture of Martin Buber in 1926, is instructive here:

. . . read the Bible as though it were something entirely unfamiliar, as though it had not

[114] Notably, Sarfati (2015), along with many adherents of Reformed theology, would take issue with O’Connor’s quote: “It is not correct to call this ‘a second creation account’. This *toledot presupposes* the creation events of the Prologue . . . [and] expands on the culminating product of the Prologue: mankind. Luther affirmed this…” (p. 292). However, the aspect of a drama in two acts is what is applicable to the discussion herein.

> been set before you ready-made. . . . Face the book with a new attitude as something new. . . . Let whatever may happen occur between yourself and it. You do not know which of its sayings and images will overwhelm and mold you. . . . But hold yourself open. Do not believe anything a priori; do not disbelieve anything a priori. Read aloud the words written in the book in front of you; hear the word you utter and let it reach you. (p. ix)

I encourage the reader to bear that in mind as we begin to read through and discuss Genesis 2:4b-25, thus allowing yourself to become immersed in the story and hear how it speaks to you, as well as see the foundation it lays for the next act. With that, let the story begin.

2:4b At the time of YHWH, God's making of earth and heaven,

If one made their way to this section after reading Genesis 1-2:4a, they would notice an immediate change in reference to God. In Genesis 1, God is always "God," and here we see the change to "LORD God" (or "YHWH, God"), thus indicating a change in the Hebrew from the more generic *Elohim* in the former to *Yahweh Elohim* with the latter. *Yahweh* is the proper name of God, and Fox (1995) uses the tetragrammaton (YHWH) to stay consistent with Hebrew biblical practices and Jewish reverence for God that renders The Name ineffable. But pertinent to the story is that *Yahweh* is God's personal and relational name as understood from Moses' (Moshe) interaction with God at the burning bush in Exodus 3:13-15, which Fox (1995) translates as follows:

> 13 Moshe said to God:
>
> Here, I will come to the Children of Israel
>
> and I will say to them:
>
> The God of your fathers has sent me to you,
>
> and they will say to me: What is his name?—

what shall I say to them?

14 God said to Moshe:

EHYEH ASHER EHYEH/I will be-there howsoever I will be-there.

And he said:

Thus shall you say to the Children of Israel:

EHYEH/I-WILL-BE-THERE sends me to you.

15 And God said further to Moshe:

YHWH,

the God of your fathers,

the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov,

sends me to you.

Note that God does not immediately offer "YHWH" when Moses asks for a name, and if that had occurred Moses (and Israel) would have missed understanding God in the capacity they would need to for the journey ahead. It is one thing to know someone's name; it is another to know who they *are* and who they *will be* in relation to you. Thus, in response to Moses' question, God first declares *ehyeh asher ehyeh,* which is often translated as "I AM who I AM" or "I will be who I will be"—notably there is no "there" included as in Fox's translation. Fox (1995) notes his translation of v. 14 is atypical but is influenced by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig's interpretation and use of capital lettering that conveys the "conviction that God's name is not a proper name in the conventional sense, but rather one which evokes his immediate presence" (p. xxix). Furthermore, Buber and Rosenzweig "see God's words as a real answer to the Israelites' imagined question—an assurance of his presence. . . . 'I will be-there with you'" (p. 270). Therefore, this is the God of our story; indeed, this is our God yesterday, today, and forever:

EHYEH/I-WILL-BE-THERE with you; YHWH—"He will be"—with us.[115]

Another note in concert with God's immediate and immanent presence is the reversal of order of "heavens and earth" in Genesis 1:1 to "earth and heaven" in v. 2:4b. One can imagine the Creator of the universe moving from a seemingly distant place where he hovered over chaotic waters, to intentionally getting up close and personal and "in the dirt" with his creation, and specifically, humanity. This further emphasizes God's relationality in being-there and being-with.

5 no bush of the field was yet on earth,
no plant of the field had yet sprung up,
for YHWH, God, had not made it rain upon earth,
and there was no human/*adam* to till the soil/*adama*—
6 but a surge would well up from the ground and water all the face of the soil;
7 and YHWH, God, formed the human, of dust from the soil,
he blew into his nostrils the breath of life
and the human became a living being.

In Genesis 1 God brings order out of chaotic waters, and here we see YHWH bring life out of barren ground,[116] or what Irenaeus called "virgin earth" (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 10), which is perhaps more apt. Drawing implications from v. 5, the earth is unworked and unadulterated,

[115] A note on gender pronouns: Out of convention and convenience for better readability, YHWH, God, will have masculine pronouns, although God is not gendered and assuredly possesses attributes usually assigned to specific genders. Furthermore, regardless of what translators or commentators use, I will maintain the use of *it* or *itself* for the human until the sexes are created. This is not contrary to the text, for as Trible (1978) states regarding Genesis 2:7-8: "...this creature is not identified sexually. Grammatical gender (*'adam* as a masculine word) is not sexual identification. Nor is sexuality assumed here, since it is created later..." (p. 80).

[116] The contrast from Genesis 1 is one of an overabundance of unconstrained water to a climate where water is scarce, which parallels the climate of Israel. Survival will thus depend on YHWH to provide life-giving water. Everett's use of "surge" implies more water than is likely. The Hebrew *ed* means "mist", which would be enough wetness (like dew) to keep the soil somewhat viable (superficially), but not enough water for deep roots to be established that plants need for nutritive and structural support.

and "[f]rom this, then, whilst it was still virgin, God took dust of the earth and formed the man, the beginning of mankind" (MacKenzie, 2002, pp. 10-11).[117] But prior to that, and not to be missed, is the Hebraic word play between *adam* and *adama* that points to the reciprocating relationship humanity will have with the earth, which is a relationship that cannot be forgotten or neglected if both are to flourish. The life of humanity is dependent upon (and directly drawn from) the earth, and the earth is dependent upon humanity to tend and care for it (see Gen. 1:26-30; 2:15) so it can continue to produce life-sustaining resources.

The intimate involvement of YHWH in the creation of the human is obvious; the human is personally formed and suscitated by YHWH. Consider the material used—dust—the dry and fine particulate lying overtop the more solid ground that can be easily swept up and away by the wind. Dust, by itself, just settles and rests upon a given surface; it is not something that can retain or fall naturally into any kind of formation, and is always subject to gravity or the next wisp of air that disturbs it. Dust cannot be formed in the same manner as clay in the hands of a potter. At most, for dust to attain and retain any kind of form it must be caught up with and cling to something (for a very rudimentary example, consider "dust bunnies"). Therefore, this initial human form requires much more intimate involvement from YHWH to fashion and hold every speck of dust in place. Such a feat would require something such as YHWH enveloping the dust with his being and shaping it from the outside—like the potter shaping clay with the external force of his hands—but then having to sustain that form lest it fall apart if the "hands" let go (thus, YHWH does not let go). Or imagined another way, YHWH could be the very form the

[117] This also resonates with God creating life from barren and virgin wombs throughout the biblical story, most notably, the Second Adam, Jesus, as Irenaeus noted: "So then the Lord, summing up afresh this man, took the same dispensation of entry into flesh, being born from the Virgin by the Will and the Wisdom of God; that He also should show forth the likeness of Adam's entry into flesh, and there should be that which was written in the beginning, man after the image and likeness of God" (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 11).

dust clings to (or *attaches* to). Given that, might it be suggested the final human form is how YHWH would represent his very self in the flesh? Indeed, Genesis 1:26-27 speaks of humans being made in the image (*tselem)* of God, i.e., his likeness or resemblance, but *tselem* can also refer to a statue. Therefore, like dust clinging to a statue, imagine dust clinging to the form of YHWH, or YHWH clinging to each speck of dust and holding them all in desired formation. Irenaeus speaks in a similar vein:

> But man He formed with His own hands, taking from the earth that which was purest and finest, and mingling in measure His own power with the earth. *For He traced His own form on the formation, that that which should be seen should be of divine form: for (as) the image of God was man formed and set on the earth* [emphasis added]. (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 4)

However it occurred, the dust was caught up with and clinging to YHWH, who shaped and sustained the human form in the most intimate of ways—*by being one with it*, which is yet another example of God *with* us in the deepest of ways and details. Finally, once formed, YHWH breathes into the human's nostrils the breath of life, which was not the expired carbon dioxide humans produce and blow off, but rather the inspired oxygen to create energy that enlivened and stabilized the human form as the inherent electricity bonded the dust together into living flesh. YHWH is thus the very source of the human's life, without which it would be dry, dead, dust.

Lastly, while presumably given a somewhat mature human form for procreative practicality (see Gen. 1:28a), it does not necessarily follow that the human is developmentally mature in other ways, e.g., in terms of experience, knowledge, relationships, or wisdom. Day one for the human—its day of birth—may look like day 10,000 given its size and shape, but it can otherwise be considered like an infant, i.e., it is innocent, utterly impressionable (with a brain

still in need of further development), and dependent on its primary caregiver for all its basic needs and healthy development physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.[118] Irenaeus thought likewise:

> Now, having made man lord of the earth and all things in it, He secretly appointed him lord also of those who were servants [i.e., angels] in it. They however were in their perfection; but the lord, that is, man, was (but) small; for he was a child; and it was necessary that he should grow, and so come to (his) perfection. . . . But man was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected. . .(MacKenzie, 2002, p. 4)

Our tendency is to think of the first human as a mature adult—with all our presuppositions about what it means to be an adult—given apparent reproductive capacity and co-regency over the earth as spoken of in Genesis 1:26-28. However, while that was to be humanity's future, it may not have been the initial reality. At this point in the story, we can perhaps consider the human no more than an innocent, immature adolescent with a still developing brain, and not an adult with an accumulation of life experience, knowledge, and wisdom. Therefore, the human (and the one yet to come in the story) would need to learn in a more normal developmental way, such as we all do, through the process of attachment in relationship with its primary caregiver, YHWH.

8 YHWH, God, planted a garden in Eden/Land-of-Pleasure, in the east
and there he placed the human whom he had formed.
9 YHWH, God, caused to spring up from the soil
every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat,

[118] Recall from the previous chapter that the relationship with our primary caregiver helps organize and develop the brain (and brain development continues into early adulthood). Therefore, even if the human's brain was created with some apparent developmental maturity (e.g., already possessing the motor plans for walking), other aspects of normal, optimal development simply cannot occur outside of relationships, which "have a direct effect on the development of the domains of mental functioning that serve as our conceptual anchor points: memory, narrative, emotion, representations, and states of mind (Siegel, 2020, p. 168).

and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden,

and the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil.

Like an expectant parent, YHWH created a nursery of sorts for the human by planting a lush garden—a fertile land of pleasure—that was a safe, nourishing, and stimulating oasis within a barren desert.[119] After the human is created, YHWH places the human in the garden, but does not leave it alone to fend for itself; instead, YHWH remains with the human knowing it needs more care, attention, and development to thrive and function in its destined capacity. Irenaeus describes the scene thusly:

> [YHWH] prepared him a place better than this world, excelling in air, beauty, light, food, plants, fruit, water, and all other necessaries of life: and its name is Paradise. And so fair and good was this Paradise, that the Word of God continually resorted thither, and walked and talked with the man, figuring beforehand the things that should be in the future, [namely] that He should dwell with him and talk with him, and should be with men, teaching them righteousness. (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 4)

This teaching would be necessary, especially with the two special trees in the midst of the garden that were freely accessible and desirable, but one of which (as we shall see) the human would not be free to partake. However, there is a sense of "someday-but-not-yet-ness" regarding that Tree, for there was much more to learn and grow into first. Just like with a shiny new car sitting in the driveway, a parent does offer the car keys to an eager adolescent not yet ready or capable of driving it, so the youth must turn their attention away from what is not yet attainable, and toward that which will make them capable. This idea will be discussed more shortly.

It can be considered further that the garden, just like an infant's nursery, was created to

[119] This is in contrast to the barren wilderness nature of the land Israel was accustomed to; therefore, Israel could look to this story to see YHWH's provision and care for them that started in the beginning.

stimulate and awaken desire, for desire stimulates and facilitates growth and development, which the human still needs at this point. Imagine how parents decorate and accessorize a nursery. There are usually bright contrasting colors to stimulate eyesight, encourage gazing, and thus develop the ophthalmic and oculomotor centers in the brain. There are usually mobiles hanging overhead to do the same, but toward which the child also reaches out, thus developing integration and control of movement towards what is seen and desired to be obtained for a closer look and feel. There are usually devices that project sounds to develop auditory centers in the brain and toward which the infant also turns its head and body. The ways parents provide for the stimulation and development of sensory and motor systems are endless. But parents, themselves, also entice and challenge their infant in a myriad of ways so the infant steadily develops, e.g., placing a toy out of reach so the infant learns to roll, scoot, or crawl towards it, or opening up their arms and verbally encouraging an infant's first steps towards them. Developmental milestones are essentially rooted in desire, i.e., the desire of the child to attain and obtain things in their environment, and the desire to be with and attach to their parents, all of which is a part of the developmental process inherent in attachment as described in the previous chapter. Without such stimulation, enticement, encouragement, and relationship the infant will fail to develop optimally, and in cases of extreme neglect, the consequences are catastrophic emotionally, physically, mentally, and relationally.[120] However, these enticements and stimulating objects and activities are provided under the purview of the infant's parents, and occur within that safe, protective, guiding, and loving relationship. The same is true for the human with YHWH. Desirable and delicious trees (among other things) are abundant in the garden, but YHWH will

[120] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the reader is referred to *Romania's Abandoned Children: Deprivation, Brain Development, and the Struggle for Recovery* by Nelson, Fox & Zeanah, for an excellent (yet profoundly sad) example.

determine both when and what is safe for the human to access and partake of.

10 Now a river goes out from Eden, to water the garden,
and from there it divides and becomes four stream-heads.
11 The name of the first is Pishon/Spreader—that is the one that circles through
all the land of Ḥavila, where gold is;
12 the gold of that land is good, there too are bdellium and the precious-stone
carnelian.
13 The name of the second river was Giḥon/Gusher—that is the one that circles
through all the land of Cush.
14 The name of the third river was Ḥiddekel/Tigris—that is the one that goes to
the east of Assyria.
And the fourth river—that is Perat/Euphrates.

This section seems to break the flow of the story and interject inconsequential information, but nothing should be considered inconsequential in YHWH's story.[121] O'Connor (2018) offers this explanation:

> Encircling the newly planted garden is a single river that divides into four rivers. It might be tempting to read through these verses quickly, since their description is like a parenthesis that interrupts the action of the story. Yet they affect the plot of the drama because their presence turns the garden into an island apart, an oasis surrounded by rivers on all four sides. . . . [W]ater is the *sine qua non* of life in the desert-like region of the ancient Near East (contemporary Middle East), and it is always in short supply. To create

[121] Goldingay (2020) describes the actual or proposed locations of these rivers which are found around the land of Israel, thus pointing to a real geographical location, and connecting the garden with Israel. The point here, as with others, is to have the story resonate with Israel's own story. Actual location or not, there is a connection being made between the garden of Eden and Israel, and therefore, YHWH's involvement with and provision for Israel.

a paradise in such typography is to imagine a lush oasis, a verdant island... (p. 50)

Recall the opening of the story indicates a lack of water as a natural resource and no rain for plant growth, so living by—and being surrounded by—rivers of water allow for the trees and plants of the garden to sink deep roots and be sustained in the absence of rain. This section, then, is not inconsequential but rather reinforces the lushness (in provision and aesthetic) of the garden and how YHWH provided for and sustains its growth and needs as no area of the garden lacks life-giving water. Furthermore, this emphasizes YHWH's care and concern for creation itself, which is something the human can take note of and model as it will soon take on the role of tending and maintaining the garden. Lastly, the human is primed to be nourished and flourish while in relationship with YHWH and living in such an environment set apart from an otherwise barren and undeveloped land (see Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8).

15 YHWH, God, took the human and set him in the garden of Eden,
to work it and to watch it.
16 YHWH, God, commanded concerning the human, saying:
From every (other) tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat,
17 but from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil—
you are not to eat from it,
for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die.

Verse 15 links back to v. 8 in that YHWH placed the human in the garden, but while the previous reference highlighted the provision and purpose of the garden for the human, this reference highlights the provision and purpose of the human for the garden (i.e., YHWH’s creation), as the human is given charge to work and watch over it. Notably, to be given charge of the garden indicates at least a commensurate level of cognitive and functional capacity of the

human, yet is still not indicative of a fully mature and experienced adult ready to co-rule over the earth, which reinforces the idea of a developing adolescent still in need of instruction. The human did not plant the garden but was rather placed there and given responsibility for its maintenance, much like an adolescent given chores by a parent with an intent to create a sense of ownership and to gain experience. Therefore, these garden chores are an opportunity to serve and preserve the garden[122]—one small section of the earth—and, in doing so, the human hopefully grows in appreciation for the garden and its needs while seeing how it provides for the human in return, thus establishing and emphasizing the reciprocating relationship between *adam* and *adama*. However, this is all done alongside and under supervision of YHWH, who has already provided by example, but now likely by personal instruction, on how to tend the garden as evidenced in part by YHWH's commanding the human to eat freely from all trees except for the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. One can envision the human tending to all the trees while simultaneously eating from them to nourish itself as it works, but the warning is given to not do so when tending to the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil because of the harm it will bring. To draw from the prior analogy, the adolescent is given charge to clean and wash the car, but is not allowed to drive it (yet).

The other special tree, the Tree of Life, is not specifically mentioned here, but it could be assumed the human was allowed to eat freely from it since there is no prohibition against it. There is a sense from how the story ends in Genesis 3 that eating from the Tree of Life prevents mortality, but the fruit would need to be continually consumed to do so. Hence, physical death would begin in being cut off from that tree. It has been argued otherwise, i.e., that only a one-

[122] *Serve* and *preserve* are analogous to and alternate meanings of the Hebrew words in v. 15, *abad* and *shamar*, respectively, that Fox translates as *work* and *watch*. This *work* is different from the *work* (*melakah*) completed by God in Genesis 2:2, which is focused on construction or building that only God can do (i.e., creating). The human then *serves* and *preserves* the creation in a subordinate fashion to its Creator.

time consumption of the fruit from the Tree of Life brings immortality, but that does not seem to accord with the story as given, and one would have to assume the human happened to never eat of it, which is contrary to "eat, yes, eat" of *all* the trees (save for the one), and why would the human not readily partake of the Tree of Life if allowed to do so?

Fox's (1995) phrasing in v. 16, "YHWH, God, commanded concerning the human," is noteworthy as it conveys more than what Western Christians tend to see in this verse, which is simply a command to be followed that is disconnected from its context and YHWH's character. First, recall YHWH is *with* the human and watching over it as part of a caregiving relationship, and not dictating orders impersonally from afar like a boss to a laborer. Second, even though YHWH has the authority to command, he is doing so out of concern for the human's welfare and in concert with the nature of their relationship and the inherent character of YHWH. Therefore, given that the consequences of eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil are dire, in releasing the human to both tend and eat freely from the garden, YHWH also issues the command to not eat of that Tree out of concern for the human, their relationship, as well as knowing the full implications and consequences if the human were to do so. Furthermore, even though the command is negative, it is not to be viewed as such nor in a way that casts aspersions on YHWH, because the command is *good* and serves to perpetuate the good for all creation.

At this point neither we, nor likely the human, know why the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil is there or what role or function it serves, although its name would indicate its potential. The prevailing belief is that the Tree is a part of a test of obedience, which is neither stated nor insinuated. Furthermore, could that be the only, or best, understanding regarding the presence of this Tree and the prohibition placed upon it? Consider Bilezikian's (2006) comments:

Quite often, the tree is viewed as a means of testing Adam's obedience, as a malevolent

> device designed to make him trip, as a trick perpetrated by God on humans for some mysterious motive hidden within the inscrutable ways of divinity. Such a view demeans the character of God. The definition of the tree shows that it was provided by God to fulfill a positive function. It was the visible reminder to Adam of his humanity and therefore of the necessity for him to remain subservient to God as his creator. (pp. 29-30)

In keeping with YHWH's character and relationship with the human, it is hard to imagine YHWH creating and placing this special and desirable Tree in the garden just to withhold it from the human—an innocent and childlike human—as a test of obedience. It is difficult to imagine loving parents doing that to their child, as it appears more cruel, unjust, and self-serving.[123] It makes more sense for the Tree to "fulfill a positive function" for the human, and it is present now (rather than appearing later) as part of a completed and very good creation, but not something the human can partake of yet.

To illustrate the point, consider the common analogy of children with a hot stove. First, the home needs the stove so its inhabitants can prepare food (or even generate heat); they cannot wait for everyone in the house to be of the age or experience to use the stove before it is there. The stove is part of the house at the outset for the sake of everyone living there. Second, the children, depending on their age, are commanded to either not go near, not touch, or not use the stove so they do not get burned. The parents are not giving commands to test their children's obedience, they are doing so to protect the children. With increasing cognitive capacity, motor development, experience, and problem solving-skills, combined with parental instruction and supervision, the children will eventually learn to safely use the stove on their own (even as it

[123] Throughout the Hebrew Bible, justice is invariably tied to righteousness (*mishpat* and *tzedakah*), creating a hendiadys that combines the two words to create a more powerful singular expression, in this case, "righteous justice," which means doing right by people (Weinfeld, 1995). God's justice is not human justice. Therefore, I would argue, for a parent to test the loyalty of a child is not to do right by the child and is instead self-serving to the parent.

continues to hold the inherent danger of being burned). But until then, the stove, as it stands in the house with its prohibitions around it, serves as a visible reminder of the children's limitations and their need to heed and rely upon their parents until such a time as they are allowed to use it. With that, YHWH's concerned command to the human can be considered in that same regard. Furthermore, YHWH's directive is also instructive in providing a reason that will help motivate the human to not eat the fruit. Consider again a child with a hot stove. In walking up to the stove, the child may be told, "no, don't touch, it's hot and it will burn you." The child may not fully know what that means, but it is information included to instruct and then motivate behavior that will protect the child, even if the child has never experienced being burned, nor completely understands the consequences or mechanisms of such an injury.

Keeping this in mind, YHWH commands the human to not eat of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil because "on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die." Notably, Fox (1995) uses the word "must," which gives a much harsher and negative implication on the surface, and most translations render the underlying Hebrew phrase *mowt tamut,* lit. "die, you shall die," as "you shall die," or "you will surely die."[124] In any regard, the consequences are clear: the human will die if it eats from that Tree. Such information is added to educate and motivate the desired behavior that will protect the human, just like with the child and the hot stove. But, also like the inexperienced and immature child, the human may not know what *death* means. Has the human experienced any form of death? Or is the human able to understand what

[124] I could not find the use of "must" in any other translation (Jewish or Christian). The only other variation I found was from Alter (2019), who translates the phrase as "you are doomed to die." Alter (2019) notes on vv. 16-17: "The form of the Hebrew in both instances [i.e., eat, yes, eat; die, yes, die] is what grammarians call the infinitive absolute . . . The general effect of this repetition is to add emphasis to the verb, but because in the case of the verb "to die" it is the pattern regularly used in the Bible for the issuing of death sentences, "doomed to die" is an appropriate equivalent." This "death sentence" use may be why Fox chose "you must die." Furthermore, the phrasing in Hebrew does not indicate sudden death, but rather death at some point in time, which is in concert with a "death sentence" and "doomed to die."

death is for it to be an effective incentive that assures the human will not eat from the Tree? It is possible YHWH explained what death is, but the human—based on the story given thus far—has not experienced or seen death in any form; the human has only experienced life, and life abundantly. Perhaps YHWH explained death as a taking away of life, but there is no way to know for certain. One caution we must heed is to not read our (or Israel's) experiences and understanding of death back into the story and onto the human.[125] We do better to consider the story as it comes, as well as where it is placed in the larger overarching story of the Bible, and in that regard it is the only the concept of death that is introduced to the human with this command, but there is no frame of reference or personal experience from which the human can understand its meaning or implications. In this instance, death would be an abstract concept and not a known reality, much like *hot* or *burn* may be abstract concepts to a child until they are, unfortunately, experienced.

With that, Fox's (1995) naming of the Tree as the "Tree of Knowing Good and Evil" instead of the more common "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" is apropos.[126] This seemingly subtle name change highlights an important distinction in that *knowing* is experiential and *knowledge* is something one possesses. One can come to acquire knowledge through experience and/or education (assimilation of information without direct experience), but truly *knowing* something, I would argue, requires direct experience to some degree. To use a personal example, in physical therapy school I consumed a vast amount of knowledge about how the body works through formal education, but it was not until I began working with that knowledge *with*

[125] In reading the text in a literal sense, or through the lens of inerrancy, then the story must be taken as being written early and without death as a condition the first human would already understand. We are taking the story as it comes, and regarding this section as a recapitulation of Day 6 (Sarfati, 2015). Therefore, there is no death, only life, and the human has no other experience or frame of reference from which to draw.

[126] Fox (1995) notes: "Interpreters disagree on the meaning of this phrase. It could be a merism (as in "knowledge from A to Z"—that is, of everything), or an expression of moral choice" (p. 19).

people that I really came to *know* how the body worked, i.e., *knowing* how the body worked did not truly happen until I *experienced* it directly. Taking that into consideration, there are at least a couple of ways we could understand the nature or function of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil.

First, perhaps consuming the fruit from the Tree *would* provide all of the knowledge the human would need to be an effective co-regent and good steward of the earth. Much like maintaining life by continually eating from the Tree of Life, perhaps knowledge—but specific knowledge pertaining to good and evil (i.e., wisdom and ethics)—could be gained, sustained, and/or increased by continually eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. However, such complex knowledge would not be suited for the still immature and inexperienced human, who would first need to develop the capacity to understand and assimilate such knowledge, which can be done safely in relationship and partnership with YHWH. To acquire such knowledge at an inappropriate stage of development would not only be overwhelming, but confusing and, at worst, dangerous (or traumatic). Therefore, YHWH's command to not eat from the Tree—at this point in the story—is a *good* thing, both for the human and the rest of creation.

A second way of understanding the nature or function of the Tree is within the context of the prohibition placed upon it. To disobey the command gives direct experiential knowledge of good and evil, albeit not in the way YHWH would desire. To disobey the command and eat of the Tree could, as stated above, overwhelm the human with knowledge it cannot manage, but along with that the human will experience other consequences of disobeying, such as the impact on its relationship with YHWH and the rest of creation, and, most obviously, the experience of death (whatever that truly means). At this point in the story, the meaning and extent of the consequences remain unknown, but what could be understood is that disobedience will supply

the human with the knowledge and experience of good and evil—the good of what was and should have been (pre-consumption), and the evil of what has now some (post-consumption). Said another way, it would be the act of eating from the prohibited Tree that would give the knowledge of good and evil as the human experienced the consequences of not obeying YHWH's command.

One final thing to note is that YHWH does not linger or stop with the command (as we often do), which further diminishes the idea of this as a test of obedience. YHWH does not focus on the command, nor reiterate it, but rather moves forward with the human, providing it with new experiences for learning and growing in maturity. This is still a very good creation full of potential and life, and assuredly YHWH wants to keep it that way. Thus, the command is given out of concern for the welfare of the human (and all of creation), but the story does not stop there, nor is it the central theme.

18 Now YHWH, God, said:

It is not good for the human to be alone,

I will make him a helper corresponding to him.

It is often emphasized how this is the first utterance of something being "not good" in an otherwise "very good" creation. What YHWH declares "not good" is for the human to be alone, which not only continues the relational theme of the story, but also resonates with the negative consequences of being alone in regard to both trauma and attachment, as discussed previously. Even though YHWH was with the human, and therefore not technically alone, it was not good for the human to be the lone representation of itself which, on a practical level, would preclude procreation, but more importantly, there would be no other human with which to relate (recall that *we are relationship*), learn, grow, enjoy, support, experience life, and share in the work, all

of which are only a few of the myriad benefits human relationships can offer. The underlying Hebrew, *ezer kenegdo* (for "helper corresponding to him"), supports these anticipated relational attributes. Alter (2019) describes the phrasing as such:

> The Hebrew *ʿezer kenegdo* (King James Version "help meet") is notoriously difficult to translate. The second term means "alongside him," "opposite him," "a counterpart to him." "Help" is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas *ʿezer* elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms. (footnote to v. 18)

Given that description, Alter (2019) translates *ezer kenegdo* as "a sustainer beside him," which also resonates with Trible's (1978) explication:

> The Hebrew word *'ēzer*, rendered here as "companion," has been traditionally translated "helper"—a translation that is totally misleading because the English word *helper* suggests an assistant, a subordinate, indeed, an inferior, while the Hebrew word *'ēzer* carries no such connotation. To the contrary, in the Hebrew scriptures this word often describes God as the superior who creates and saves Israel.[127] In our story the accompanying phrase, "corresponding to it" (*kenegdô*), tempers this connotation of superiority to specify identity, mutuality, and equality. According to Yahweh God, what the earth creature needs is a companion, one who is neither subordinate nor superior; one who alleviates isolation through identity. (p. 90)

Lastly, even though Fox (1995) chooses "helper" here, he states: "The whole phrase (Heb. *ezer kenegdo*) could be rendered "a helping counterpart." At any rate, the Hebrew does not suggest a subordinate position. . ." (p. 20).

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[127] Trible (1978) provides the following Scripture references in her own footnote placed here: "Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5" (p. 140, n.13)

Therefore, while the human needed YHWH, and that relationship would always be its first and primary (yet always one of Creator and creature), YHWH also knew the human needed an *ezer kenegdo* with whom to be in a reciprocating relationship marked by equality, mutuality, partnership, and companionship that would serve to sustain them both. But the human has no idea of any of these things at present, and perhaps is not even aware it is alone or that such a state is "not good," because YHWH is not directing the statement to the human. This discretion employed by YHWH resonates with the prohibition on eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. While being alone may not be evil, it is definitely not good, and that is knowledge YHWH is withholding from the human. In doing so, it makes what is to come a sweet surprise that extends the human's experience of only good.

19 So YHWH, God, formed from the soil every living-thing of the field and every fowl of the heavens
and brought each to the human, to see what he would call it;
and whatever the human called it as a living being, that became its name.
20 The human called out names for every herd-animal and for the fowl of the heavens and for every living-thing of the field,
but for the human, there could be found no helper corresponding to him.

The process of "making a helper" begins, curiously enough, by making every other living thing that would dwell in the earth and sky, and via a similar process that YHWH used to make the human. However, there are key distinctions to note: 1) the animals are made from the soil and not dust, and 2) YHWH does not intimately breathe the breath of life into them. So, while the animals and the human are made of the same *adama*, the more intimately involved process as spoken of previously is unique to the human.

The human likely observed the making of each animal as YHWH brought each one to the human for it to name, thus establishing a relationship between the human and the animals. One can imagine this process of naming the animals is part of the human's education for ruling over them (see Gen. 1:26). It is unlikely the names were arbitrary, but rather based on seeing the animals being made, or seeing their form and learning how they move and vocalize, or perhaps YHWH even informed the human of each animal's inherent nature. Therefore, in the process of naming, the human was also coming to *know* each animal and how to relate to each animal, which was a natural step in the education of a co-regent of the earth. O'Connor's (2018) explication of naming resonates with this:

> The capacity to name creatures involves the authority to designate in some sense their character, essence, or unique ways of being in the world, to interpret who and what they are. . . .[N]aming can also be an act of recognition and connection. Parents name children to connect them to themselves, to their ancestors, to their culture and society, and as acts of hope for the future. . . .
>
> Names create relationships, establish linkages, and join people and things with one another. In some traditions, the one who names recognizes the essence or character of the thing or person being named and so establishes identity or realm of connection with the named. To name does not necessarily mean to subject or exploit. The namer knows who the creatures are, honors their identity, and lives in relationship with them. (p. 53)

When the naming is complete it is said no *ezer kenegdo* could be found. This seems to imply the human was looking, but again, it appears based on YHWH speaking in third person that YHWH had withheld from the human the information that it was alone or the plans to make an *ezer kenegdo*. It can also imply that YHWH somehow failed in his goal to make an *ezer*

kenegdo, which seems preposterous given the vast creative accomplishments thus far, and YHWH's knowledge of who the human needed. However, remember this is a story—the first act of the drama—and YHWH is a master storyteller, so the delay was likely intentional as it "delays the resolution of the problem, creates tension, builds expectation, and turns the actual solution into a dramatic climax. The delay also [made] space for the arrival of new creatures in the garden. . ." (O'Connor, 2018, p. 53). Furthermore, as these creatures came one-by-one, it is likely the human noticed how vastly different each animal was from itself, and perhaps also noticed that none was suited to help rule the earth alongside it. Indeed, in just that regard it would not be good for the human to be alone, and especially so when considering the Three Persons of the Godhead that rule the universe. Relationships are central, and an *ezer kenegdo* was needed, but rather than form one in the same manner as the animals (from the soil) or the human (with dust and divine breath), YHWH makes the *ezer kenegdo* in a completely new way.

21 So YHWH, God, caused a deep slumber to fall upon the human, so that he slept,
he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place.
22 YHWH, God, built the rib that he had taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human.

YHWH's acts of creation continue to expand in meaningful ways. First it is through speaking in Genesis 1, then through forming from dust and soil, and now through surgical concision and care with a living being. YHWH does not simply grab some arbitrary flesh for creative use, he carefully excises a rib and then closes the flesh before turning to the new creation.[128] The act of closing the flesh can be viewed a couple of ways: 1) YHWH ensures the

[128] Fox (1995) notes that *tsela* can also be translated as "side," which some prefer as it "[parallels] other ancient peoples' concept of an original being that was androgynous" (p. 20), and many have used the play on words,

health of the human by not leaving an open wound, thus demonstrating care and attention to detail, and 2) by closing the flesh he has created the boundaries of the human, i.e., it will be differentiated from the new creation even though they will share the same flesh and bone.

YHWH then creatively "[shifts] to architect, designer, and builder: 'and Yahweh God built the rib which he took from the earth creature into woman'" (Trible, 1978, p. 95). The woman was built (*banah)*, which is distinctive from being formed (*yatsar*), as with the human. While both were created from raw materials, the woman was created from many kinds of raw material: bone, muscle, nerve, tendon, cartilage, ligament, marrow, blood, and likely some epithelial cells from the skin. With all the necessary materials at hand, YHWH builds the woman according to his intended design, which is the same, but still different and differentiated from the human. Another distinction is that YHWH does not breathe the breath of life into the woman, but there is no need since YHWH is already working with living flesh: "She has [the human's] flesh and, like him, she too is animated by the breath of life given directly by God, for she is taken from his flesh that is already animated by the breath of life" (O'Connor, 2018, p. 54). This goes further to show that the breath of life was not just a breath, but rather became an integral part of every human cell, i.e., the breath of YHWH God was not merely oxygenated air or a means of stimulating the lungs to breathe—it was the source of life itself down to the cellular level.

To the now awake and recovering human—who provided the material but was entirely passive (and perhaps asleep) during the creative process (Trible, 1978)—YHWH brings the woman. The human did not choose, create, nor find its *ezer kenegdo*, YHWH did and then brings the two together, i.e., two new creations:

"splitting the Adam," to describe this event. The lack of sexual differentiation is implicit in the Hebrew text thus far, and there is no need to have the more grotesque image of splitting the human that could not simply be fixed by "closing up the flesh"; it would take a complete refashioning. Therefore, "rib" seems to make better sense with the context.

> In becoming material for creation, the earth creature changes character. Whereas the making of the plants and animals were divine acts extrinsic to the earth creature itself, the making of the sexes is intrinsic. Indeed, this act has altered the very flesh of the creature: from one come two. After this intrinsic division, *hā-'ādām* is no longer identical with its past, so that *when next it speaks a different creature is speaking* [emphasis added]. To be sure, continuity exists in the oneness of humanity, but here stress falls upon the discontinuity that results from sexual differentiation. (Trible, 1978, p. 97)

One must caution against taking the "discontinuity" too far beyond sexual differentiation, though. In bringing the two together there is no hint of a power differential, neither here nor in Genesis 1, and the creation of the two from the one helps emphasize this point. The human and the animals were made from the same earth, but the distinction that set them apart was the human receiving YHWH's breath of life and being made in YHWH's image. Here, two new creatures are made from one human, with the only difference being the (necessary) sexual differentiation that exists. They are both carrying the breath of life, both made in the image of God (see also Gen. 1:27),[129] and both are co-regents of the earth called to rule, be fruitful and fill the earth, which can now be accomplished, because they were both made for each other. Goldingay (2020) adds:

> [YHWH's] alternative procedure certifies the fact of oneness in the nature of man and woman (and of all who will be born from them) and also explains the sense of oneness that human beings may have with one another over against animals and the particular sense that a man and a woman may have in relation to each other, as if they have found

[129] To further evidence thus, Trible (1978) discusses the chiastic structure of Genesis 1:27 in depth and states: "Clearly, 'male and female' correspond structurally to 'the image of God', and this formal parallelism indicates a semantic correspondence" (p. 17).

their other half. (comments on 2:21-24, para. 1)

Such a realization is a cause for celebration, and the human breaks forth into song with lyrical poetry (O'Connor, 2018).

23 The human said:

This-time, she-is-it!

Bone from my bones,

flesh from my flesh!

She shall be called Woman/*Isha*

for from Man/*Ish* she was taken!

The human's joy and delight are evident in the presence of another who is of the same kind as him, bone from his bone, flesh from his flesh. The opening exclamation—lit. “this-time, this-one-is-it!” (Fox, 1995, p. 21)—evidences he may have been noticing nothing in creation corresponded to him and perhaps he was starting to feel alone, a feeling YHWH was attuned to (like an attentive and responsive parent would be), declared it “not good,” and rectified the situation in proper time. It is also possible that in waking up from his divine surgery the human felt like he was missing something (or someone) that was once embodied but was now absent, desired, and needed, i.e., a need to reconnect, or securely attach to another, was activated via the attachment system. This idea and imagery plays off Trible's (1978) previously stated remarks that the human was “no longer identical with its past,” and Trible (1978) continues that argument as follows:

> The surgery [was] radical, for it [resulted] in two creatures where before there was only one. The new creature, built from the material of *hā-'ādām,* is female, receiving her identity in a word that is altogether new to the story, the word *'iššâ*. The old creature

> transformed is male, similarly receiving identity in a word that is new to the story, *'îš*. . . . The story itself [had built] ambiguity into the word *hā-'ādām*, an ambiguity that should prevent interpreters from limiting it to one specific and unequivocal meaning throughout. Furthermore, the ambiguity in the word matches the ambiguity in the creature itself—the ambiguity of one flesh becoming two creatures.
>
> But no ambiguity clouds the words *'iššâ* and *'îš*. One is female, the other male. *Their creation is simultaneous, not sequential* [emphasis added]. One [did] not proceed the other… (p. 98)

Notably, this last statement clearly corresponds to Genesis 1:27: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God did he create it, male and female did he create them" (Fox, 1995). There is no sense of sequence therein, other than the undifferentiated human preceding the differentiated male and female, just as the story in Genesis 2 renders it.

> **24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.**

The next verse in the story seems out of place as it points to future realities and not the present context. This presupposes marriage, especially given the translation of *isha* here as "wife", and the "one flesh" reference has sexual presuppositions. But the leap to marriage and sexual union need not be the only implication of this verse, and it can also speak to the larger context of humanity and community (which carries import for non-married humans). Goldingay (2020) explains that this verse is not establishing rules for the institution of marriage but is simply stating what happens, i.e., a man leaves his parents and clings (*dābaq*) to a woman (who also leaves her parents) when they do marry. But *dābaq* can apply to other non-sexual relationships, such as in Ruth clinging to Naomi (Ruth 1:14) or, more often, people clinging to

YHWH (e.g., Deut. 10:20; Josh. 23:8; 2 Kings 18:6).[130] Therefore, *dābaq* does not refer to or suggest sexual union.

> And while the expression "one flesh" comes only here in the First Testament, other references to flesh (*bāśār*; e.g., Gen. 37:27; Neh. 5:5) do not suggest a reference to sex but to forming one family unit that replaces the one into which one was born. It is a strange phenomenon. After all, the man was born from his parents and he has formed one community with them through his life so far. But the origin of woman in being constructed out of man explains why this transfer of loyalty is natural. Whereas the man and the woman have been one flesh with their respective parents, now they become one flesh with each other. They become one new family unit, as if they have been born that way, because in a sense they had been, the man declares when he calls her "bones from my bones" and "flesh from my flesh" (Goldingay, 2020, comments on 2:21-24, para. 3)

Hence, while much has been made of this interluding verse regarding marriage (yet another important relationship), let it also harken back to the initial impetus for the creation of woman, i.e., it is not good for the human to be alone. It is not good for any human to be alone, and this creative act of differentiating the human into two does not just serve to draw a male and female to each other, but to draw all of humanity towards itself as one flesh.[131] Furthermore, it is the tearing apart of that flesh in any relational context that is painful and grievous.

25 Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed.

We now return to the moment immediately after the human sang his song of joy and delight. Let us read it again without the segue of v. 24.

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[130] Also recall the imagery of dust clinging to YHWH in the creation of the human.
[131] Consider that *one flesh* is also imagery for the Body of Christ.

23 The human said:

This-time, she-is-it!

Bone from my bones,

flesh from my flesh!

She shall be called Woman/*Isha*

for from Man/*Ish* she was taken!

25 Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed.

What is noticeable is the translation switch for *isha* from "woman" to "wife," assuredly due to its use in v. 24, but perhaps we could refrain from projecting into their future and recall who these two new creatures are in this moment. As stated previously, even if having bodies capable of procreation, they were still innocent and immature and in need of development into what YHWH had planned for them, which had already begun for the human prior to this point.[132] Irenaeus (n.d.) does well to remind us of this initial immaturity, innocence, and childlikeness when stating, e.g., the human "could not receive [perfection], being as yet an infant" (Book 4.38.1), which meant the human "having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound" (Book 4.38.3), so a normal developmental process was necessary. Regarding being naked and unashamed, Irenaeus (n.d.) posits "inasmuch as they, having been created a short time previously, had no understanding of the procreation of children: for it was necessary that they

[132] Given the learning that occurred prior to the creation of "two from one," it can be reasonably considered that such acquired knowledge was retained in both, just as their inherent natures and the image of God were retained. There is a common assumption that the man told the woman about the prohibition on the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, which is nowhere stated or implied, so it can be just as reasonably postulated that such knowledge was shared between them when they went from one to two. This also is consonant with the lack of a power differential, which would absolve responsibility of the man for the woman in a patriarchal sense (but not from an *agape* sense).

should first come to adult age, and then multiply from that time onward" (Irenaeus, n.d., Book 3.22.4). Lastly, the following statement (also from Irenaeus) probably best reflects the state of things as we read them in v. 25:

> And Adam and Eve—for that is [their forthcoming names]—were naked, and were not ashamed; for there was in them an innocent and childlike mind, and it was not possible for them to conceive and understand anything of that which by wickedness through lusts and shameful desires is born in the soul. For they were at that time entire, preserving their own nature; since they had the breath of life which was breathed on their creation: and, while this breath remains in its place and power, it has no comprehension and understanding of things that are base. And therefore they were not ashamed, kissing and embracing each other in purity after the manner of children. (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 5)

Conclusion

Hopefully this walk through the garden has been one that was relished, and that the reader was taken in by all the rich goodness of YHWH God and creation. We have been introduced to YHWH on a very personal level, i.e., God *with* us, EHYEH/I-WILL-BE-THERE with you, thus showing he is not a disengaged God faraway, but one deeply involved and intentionally relational, and as such, he builds relationality into every aspect of creation. This is demonstrated in his intimately involved creation of the human, and it being formed in his image with and for a purpose, i.e., to be co-regent *with* YHWH over the earth. Next, we saw the lush "nursery," i.e., the garden in Eden, or the home that was prepared for the human to live in, full of stimulation and desirable, nourishing trees for the human to enjoy, but also tend to, which was the beginning of the human's education in being a good and caring steward and co-regent of YHWH's creation. While the human may be of near-adult size, it is the age of an infant, and thus

immature and inexperienced and needing to grow, develop, and learn who YHWH created and intended it to be and do. The education progressed alongside YHWH as he created each animal from the ground and brought them one by one to the human to name and relate to, thus learning and observing each animal's nature and way of being. But in the process, the human likely came to realize there is none like itself in all of creation, a fact YHWH already knew, but the human would be just starting to experience along with, perhaps, a sense of isolation and feeling alone, all of which was not good. YHWH again gets up close and personal in the creative, detailed, and caring act of building another human from the human itself, which effectively creates two new and differentiated creatures simultaneously: a male and female human; a man and a woman. YHWH brings the human's *ezer kenegdo* to him and song bursts forth. The excitement is evident as they begin their new relationship and life together as the first community of two living in and with the garden and its inhabitants, of which YHWH is also a dweller. Therefore, this first act of the story serves to highlight the reciprocating web of relationships that exist in creation for its survival and flourishing: YHWH with humanity and all of creation, humanity with the earth and its inhabitants, humanity with itself, and then each individual self within itself given the differentiation created at the end.

Perhaps for some it is noticeable that there is no mention of the prohibition on the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. That is because it is not the point of the story, nor even a central theme in the story; however, it was part of the human's education and for its welfare. The mention of the prohibition should have been sufficiently buried within the greater themes of relationship, goodness, and flourishing, abundant life, because if we miss those things, we are missing the mark. Indeed, if we miss those things, we miss Jesus, the *telos*. To repeat a point made from the introduction of this chapter: the Pharisees and scribes followed and built their lives around the

letter of the law, which would lead them to focus on such things in the Torah as the command to not eat from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, and in doing so they missed Jesus entirely. Again, may we not make the same mistake.

Chapter 6: Revisiting the Garden, Act Two

Act one of our two-part drama came to a close with the unashamedly joyous meeting of the man and the woman. The two new and differentiated humans were brought together to restore the "one flesh" from which they came, and YHWH's very good creation was complete. The closing verse of act one links the story to the second act of the drama, and also serves as a turning point in the story. Genesis 2:25 carries different implications depending on whether it is read as the end of act one or the beginning of act two. To recall, Genesis 2:25 states: "Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed" (Fox, 1995). When read as the conclusion to act one, it reflects the innocent and unashamed state of the two humans enjoying one another platonically, like young children oblivious to each other's nakedness and having no adulterated thoughts regarding such. Irenaeus's statement is worth repeating here: "And therefore they were not ashamed, kissing and embracing each other in purity after the manner of children" (MacKenzie, 2002, p. 5). However, as they continue to develop and mature alongside one another under the guidance of YHWH,[133] and to thus ensure its appropriate time, the couple's love for one another will deepen and be consummated as they move forward in their charge to be fruitful and multiply. But until then, the words from Song of Solomon, repeated three times throughout, ring true: "do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!" (*NRSVue*, 2022, 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

This rendering of Genesis 2:25 also reveals how YHWH intended humanity to live and be: in a state of innocence (or incorruption), forming intimate relationships with one another (regardless of sex), and without shame; where each person is fully seen, accepted, and loved

[133] Being of reproductive age (which may have been 12-13 years old in the ANE) does not mean one is physically mature, nor emotionally, mentally, or spiritually mature. As argued in the previous chapter, while perhaps having near adult-sized, pubescent bodies, it by no means indicated they were experienced and mature adults ready for marriage, family, or their role as co-regents.

without condition. Furthermore, the state within the garden of Eden that closes the first act is YHWH's enduring intention and desire: YHWH, humanity, and all of creation in one unified, relational, and reciprocating experience of *shalom*. However, our story is not finished, and as we move into the second act let us not forget—as many Western Christians often have and do—this first and very important half of the story and the foundation that it laid. The first act established the relational foundations of humanity, i.e., that we were made from relationship and for relationship with YHWH, one another, and all of creation—recall that *we are relationship*—and this must be kept in mind as we continue.

Therefore, we will continue to read and discuss the text through the lens of relationality, but this time with an additional perspective. "In recent decades biblical scholars have increasingly come to regard the concept of trauma as a powerful interpretive lens" (Frechette & Boase, 2016, p. 1), and that lens will also be employed herein, specifically regarding the responses of the humans to the experience of eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. Recalling the history of trauma we surveyed, and considering how trauma is presently understood, it can be surmised that what humans experienced in terms of trauma a few millennia ago is arguably not much different than it is today. Human physiology and neurology have essentially remained the same and, accordingly, so have our responses to potentially traumatizing events. Therefore, by drawing upon the previous discussions on trauma and attachment (in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively), we will see how the act of eating from the Tree was a traumatizing experience, i.e., what occurred was a negative and unexpected event, creating within the humans a profound sense of confusion and overwhelm that exceeded their ability to cope, resulting in observable trauma responses. Subsequently, the security and safety (and *shalom*) of the garden and all the relationships therein were also shattered in the process.

Furthermore, there was no mitigation or resolution to the trauma, without which the trauma becomes internalized and embodied in the humans who will then operate from that foundation as they begin their new life outside the garden.

Genesis 3: Breaching the Relational Foundations of Humanity

In Western Christian vernacular, the central event in Genesis 3 is referred to as "The Fall of Man (or Mankind)," or simply, "The Fall." This description is perpetuated and reinforced by the chapter headings found in popular English Christian Bible translations, e.g., the *New International Version*, *English Standard Version*, and *New American Standard Bible* all use one of those specific phrases; but other variations exist, such as, "The Man and Woman Sin" (*New Living Translation*), "The Temptation and the Fall (or Fall of Man)" (*Christian Standard Bible, New English Translation, New King James Version*), "Human Disobedience" (*Good News Translation)* and "The First Sin and Its Punishment" (*NRSVue*). While headings may serve to highlight actions or events in the text, they can also inject translators' presuppositions and/or influence (or reinforce) the way the story is read. Notably, the Hebrew Bible does not have such headings that break up the flow of the story nor influence the meaning or interpretation of the text; furthermore, Jews do not refer to this section of Scripture as "The Fall," nor do they regard that as explicit in the text nor its essential meaning (Levine & Brettler, 2020). However, for Christians (at least many in the West), that meaning has been galvanized, i.e., the humans sin by disobeying, bring about the fall and corruption of all mankind, and are punished for it, all of which we still feel the effects of today.

But is that the only way to read and interpret this story? The majority of chapter headings suggest as much, and so would those beholden to the dominant interpretation of the story that undergirds the doctrine of original sin. However, interestingly, the *King James Version* has "The

Serpent's Deception" for its chapter heading, which subtly shifts the perspective and perhaps gets closer to what should be given more attention and consideration. In this regard, disobedience is decentered in light of deception, giving us a better chance—or another chance—to see what such deception really brings, and, furthermore, that it is the deception, rather than the humans disobedience, that does the most damage. Therefore, decenter the idea of disobedience as central to the narrative. Just as the command was not central to the first half of the story, the act of disobeying it—in and of itself—is not central to the second half. The focus on disobedience (and punishment) serves to make us miss the significance of all the other things happening in the story. Therefore, an appropriate chapter heading for this proposed reading of the text could be "Innocence Betrayed." With that, let the story continue from where it left off.

25 Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed.

We have already considered this verse as it pertains to the ending to the first act, but now, as mentioned above, we must consider it from another perspective—that of vulnerability—for upon which the story turns. Being naked and unashamed represents a state of being unhidden, blameless, guiltless, and innocent, but also one of being fully exposed, laid bare, open, and unprotected. Maintaining such a state requires trust and an implicit sense of safety, which the humans had experienced thus far in the garden. McCall (2019) concurs:

> At the end of the creation account we find the first humans in a setting that is peaceful, safe, and beautiful—in short, a place of genuine *shalom*. . . . The environment is stable and peaceful; the actions of Adam and Eve show complete and beautiful innocence. . . .
>
> The first humans revel in shalom and enjoy sweet communion. They share fellowship and communion with their Creator. Their relationship is one of complete and

> total trust; they are accustomed to walking with the Lord God in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8).
>
> The first humans also share sweet communion with each other. They are made for each other, they belong together, they are appropriate to each other. . . . Together bearing the image of God, they share "perfect equality as human persons" in the glorious fittingness of their irreducible differences as man and woman. . . .
>
> Moreover, the first humans enjoy *shalom* with respect to the rest of creation. (Chapter 3.II.A. paras 1, 4-6)

But, as stated, we are at a turning point in the story, and the humans' desirable yet vulnerable state of being becomes a significant liability, for it is the inherent risk that being vulnerable always carries with it.

3:1a Now the snake was more shrewd than all the living-things of the field that YHWH, God, had made.

A new character enters the story, but only new in the sense of action and not presence. As stated, the snake was one of the many "living-things of the field that YHWH, God, had made," therefore it not only belonged in the garden, but would also be considered "good" along with the rest of creation. It was also a creature the human named and thus knew, i.e., the human knew the snake's inherent nature and way of being. Given the state of *shalom* among all relationships in the garden,[134] it can be assumed there was a relationship of *shalom* between the snake and the humans; therefore, the snake was not something the humans would consider untrustworthy or a threat (both of which would be "not good"). Furthermore, it is unlikely YHWH would create

[134] To connect this with attachment theory, this state of *shalom* the humans have consistently experienced in their relationships to YHWH and all of creation are their internal working models, i.e., every relationship in the garden is safe and trustworthy, and they will operate from that implicit mental schema.

something designed to be adversarial not only to humans, but also to YHWH, which would also be "not good" as it would disrupt the *shalom* of the garden. Therefore, there is nothing to indicate the snake is inherently evil or approaching the humans with malicious intent.[135]

As indicated in this verse, the inherent nature of the snake was one of being "more shrewd," but the underlying Hebrew word *arum* is also seen translated here as *crafty*, *cunning*, *subtle*, or *clever*. However, *arum*, in general, is most often translated as *sensible* or *prudent*, e.g., in Proverbs 12:23; 13:16; 14:8; or 22:3, and in each of those instances it refers to the exercise of discernment, i.e., one who is *arum* is discerning, over against those who succumb to foolishness or deceit. In this sense, *arum* foreshadows what is to come in that the humans, still being immature and childlike, lack the discernment necessary to accurately perceive and act wisely when challenged beyond their epistemological and experiential limits.

Fox's (1995) use of "nude" in the previous verse (Genesis 2:25) is presumably meant to pair with his choice of "shrewd" in this verse as a means of acknowledging the Hebraic word play occurring between *arumim* (nude) and *arum* (shrewd; Alter, 2019). This harkens to the prior occurrence of word play between *adam* and *adama*, and given the relationship implied therein, it can be surmised there is an intimated relationship between *arum* and *arumim.* In the former instance, *adam* is taken from *adama* in an act of creation and an ushering in of life, and in the latter—given the turning point of the story—*arum* (shrewdness) will serve to take something from *arumin* (nudeness) in an act of uncreation and ushering in death.

Christians typically attribute the snake with, or as, satan, especially given later New Testament references, most notably Revelation 12:9 (see also 20:2): "The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole

[135] "The widespread assumption of biblical scholars and theologians, for millennia, has been that the serpent is and symbolizes evil. This presupposition has shaped the interpretation of Genesis" (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 276).

world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (*NRSVue*, 2022). Notably, the snake/serpent representations (or symbols) are bookends to the overarching story of the Bible; a story that includes overcoming our adversary. That being said, there is nothing in the immediate story to suggest that satan is present, or that the snake is satan (and most Jewish interpreters would agree). However, if satan were to commandeer a creature, the snake would be an excellent choice given its inherent nature. But to reiterate, there is nothing inherently evil about the snake or its nature, and the Ancient Near East has a history rich with serpent symbolism to represent both good and evil, so its choice in the story cannot clearly be considered a representation of evil or satan (Charlesworth, 2010).[136] Furthermore, Jesus instructs his disciples to be as shrewd (or wise) as snakes (or serpents; see Matthew 10:16),[137] indicating its positive characteristic, or at least a morally neutral one. All that being said, as the story progresses there is an adversarial or antagonistic tone that seems to indicate something outside of YHWH's good creation has infiltrated the garden. As a follower of Jesus, the one who dealt with the devil personally and called it out as "the ancient serpent," I would agree and believe *ha-satan*—the adversary—is present either in or working through the snake.

3:1b It said to the woman:

Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the garden...!

2 The woman said to the snake:

From the fruit of the (other) trees in the garden we may eat,

3 but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden,

[136] To add, "The serpent was frequently admired in Old Testament times, not only in Near Eastern cultures but also within ancient Israel" (Charlesworth, 2010, p. 416).

[137] To note, in the Septuagint, the same Greek word, *phronimos*, is used in both Genesis 3:1 and Matthew 10:16, means "intelligent, wise, [or] prudent, i.e., mindful of one's interests" (Dickey, 2014, 5429 φρονιμος)

God has said:

You are not to eat from it and you are not to touch it,

lest you die.

It is likely many are unfamiliar with this translation of v. 3:1b; however, it is not unique to Fox (1995). Both Alter (2019) and Fohrman (2011) also consider this to be the more accurate and literal translation, although Alter (2019) removes the emphasis: "the serpent's first utterance does not have the sense of "truly" (or really) that most translators assign it" (footnote n. 2). The snake's statement is an *aposiopesis*, i.e., speech that is left incomplete or cut off (Fox, 1995), the latter of which accords with the woman's immediate response to correct and clarify, which would be commensurate with her exercising and growing in her responsibility to co-rule over creation.

Most translations render v. 3:1b in the form of a question: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (*NRSVue*, 2022), and given the dominant presuppositions about the snake's (i.e., satan's) nefarious intentions, most people read the question with an intentionally deceptive voice meant to cause the woman to doubt YHWH and/or err in her understanding, e.g., "Did *God* reeeeally say, 'You *can't eat* from *annnny* tree in the garden'?[138] Rarely, if ever, is the question posed as legitimate and asked matter-of-factly (which would be more shrewd), as if two trustworthy creatures were simply engaging in normal conversation and exchanging information about life in the garden. Furthermore, recall that the humans have neuroception (discussed in Chapter 4), which "scans for cues of safety, danger, and life-threat without involving the thinking parts of [their brains]" (Dana, 2018, p. 8) that would immediately

[138] First, I have both said and continue to hear this verse spoken in this exact manner. Secondly, it is interesting to note that the snake does not say "YHWH" but only "God" (*elohim*) that indicates a distancing or lack of relationship with YHWH, which is indicative of the fact the animals did not have the same relationship with YHWH that the humans did/do, and obviously, neither did *ha'satan*. The woman also only uses "God" instead of "YHWH" in this discourse, which can indicate the snake (shrewdly and successfully) shifted her attention onto "the law" and her understanding of it, and off of YHWH and their relationship.

alert them to any changes in their surroundings or the behavior of others (e.g., if the snake had spoken in the tone and tenor just described). In the safety of the garden and relationships of *shalom*, it is unlikely the humans' neuroception has sensed much of anything other than safety, but it would assuredly alert the humans if the snake was acting otherwise.[139] Therefore, it would be important for the snake to be very shrewd and remain imperceptible to the humans' neuroception throughout the conversation. But much is often made of the woman's response because she overstates the prohibition and adds to YHWH's command, which seems to suggest she is rattled in some way or is, in fact, unclear as to what the command really was, thus making her an easy target for deception. But is that the only way this exchange can be understood?

Regardless if the snake asks a full question or gets cut off mid-sentence, the woman's response indicates she does know what YHWH commanded, and by going further to place the extra prohibition of not touching it (or even uttering its name) indicates a desire to obey YHWH's command.[140] As Trible (1978) explains, the woman's answer is thorough in first restating the freedom they have to eat from all the trees, save for the one, and in speaking she parallels much of the same sentence structure and vocabulary YHWH used, to include the consequences of eating from the forbidden tree. Furthermore,

> [n]ot only can she relay the command of God; she can also interpret it faithfully. Her understanding guarantees obedience. If the tree is not touched, then its fruit cannot be eaten. Thus the woman builds "a fence around the Torah," a procedure that her rabbinical

[139] If the woman had been alerted to danger, this probable first-time experience of such would likely be so distracting she would not have continued with the conversation and instead withdrawn or run to YHWH for safety. Again, this exemplifies shrewdness on the part of the snake to prevent alarm and keep the woman engaged.

[140] Many have argued that since the woman did not specifically state the name of the tree, it indicates she did not know what tree was prohibited, thus adding to her supposed ignorance. However, by noting its location instead, in combination with the context of the verse, indicates she did know which tree was prohibited (Trible, 1978). Furthermore, not uttering the name of the tree can be seen as another measure of caution, much like how Jews did not and do not utter God's name so as to not inadvertently sin against YHWH. The Tree of Knowing Good and Evil is an enticing name, so to not utter it is a way to mitigate any potential desire to eat from it.

> successors developed to fully protect the law of God and to insure obedience to it. (Trible, 1978, p. 110)

This explication might lend itself to thinking the woman was wiser and more knowledgeable than her years (or days, in this case), but only because of her being compared to rabbis (but perhaps the rabbis were following her example as they interpreted it in the Torah). Therefore, the woman's response can still be viewed as consistent with her relative inexperience and immaturity as she (with the man) figured out how to ensure there was no chance they would even accidentally eat from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. When knowledge, experience, and maturity are lacking, it is best to put safeguards in place.[141] In the process of learning and growing in knowledge, discernment, and wisdom, it is reasonable to think the humans came up with such a plan, and it is also possible they discussed it with YHWH, who may have helped them come up with it, or at least would have thought it a good idea at this stage of their development. This is in concert with what attentive and responsive parents do; they help their children learn and problem-solve by being a scaffold that can progressively be removed as the children mature.[142] Just because we are not privy to such conversations does not mean they did not happen. In fact, we are not privy to much background information, and as readers and interpreters, we must exercise caution when filling in the gaps in the story to ensure they remain consistent with the overarching story that finds its culmination in Jesus.

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[141] This is what the Torah was intended to do: "Therefore the law was our disciplinarian (Gr. paidagógos; pedagogue, tutor, trainer) until Christ came" (*NRSVue*, 2022, Galatians 3:24). *Paidagōgós* is derived from *pais* (child), who needs such instruction to safely learn, grow and develop until they mature and no longer need it (e.g., being in Christ, the *telos* of the law). However, the law remains for our protection, like gutter guards on a bowling alley, when we start to drift (as even the most mature will) the law bumps us back on track.

[142] "Scaffolding" is a metaphor used in parenting and education where an adult assists a child with accomplishing tasks, achieving goals, or solving problems that lie beyond the child's level of knowledge, experience, or understanding, but as the child learns and succeeds, the adult scaffolding is progressively removed (Stone, 1998). "The child's new understanding of how to accomplish the goal is achieved via an ongoing interaction in which the adult provides carefully calibrated assistance at the child's leading edge of competence" (Stone, 1998, p. 345).

How and when the woman came to know about the command is a question many pose, but I would add, how did the snake know? Having been created after the human was given the command, it is unlikely the snake (by itself) knew of it, and if it did, it was from potentially hearing the humans (with and/or without YHWH) talk about it as they tended to the garden. Or, as is commonly thought, satan, who was apparently privy to the creation process and observed life thereafter, knew the command precisely and in commandeering the snake, is able to use the knowledge for its own ends. As for the woman, the possibilities are that the man passed along the instruction (a common assumption), or YHWH did, which is what an involved and protective parent would naturally do.[143] Another possibility is the man and woman, having been created two from one, both retained all prior knowledge the human possessed, just like they each retained the image of God and the breath of life. There are several possibilities to be considered as we are simply not told. But, regardless, the woman is aware of the command, knows it and her freedoms well, and corrects the snake accordingly.

However, what the woman does not seem to know well are the consequences of eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, which is consonant with her innocence, inexperience, and general lack of understanding and knowledge still to be gained in time. Thus, the woman stated YHWH's command in close order until the end, which is where her lack of understanding reveals itself. Consider the ending of YHWH's command as stated alongside the woman's recounting of it in parallel fashion:

"you are not to eat from it, for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die."

[143] It is commonly thought the man had the responsibility to instruct the woman, but that is not stated in the text and bypasses the relationship that YHWH has with both of them. The woman is not reliant upon the man for life and how to live, but rather YHWH. Hence, it makes more sense YHWH instructed the woman, or it was knowledge retained, i.e., the law was written on their hearts (see Romans 2:15), when they were created two from the one human who received the command.

"You are not to eat from it and you are not to touch it, lest you die."

Again, the woman clearly knows she is not to eat from the Tree, but in the way she recounts the remainder she indicates she does not understand the consequences.[144] She knows as much to state death is the consequence, but the full gravity or meaning of it escapes her as she removes the element of time ("on the day you eat of it"), and removes the emphasis ("die, yes, die"). Her insertion of the added prohibition (in place of the time element) thus seems compensatory. To explain, if the woman was mature and experienced enough to comprehend the gravity of death, there would be no need for added restrictions as the simple command of "do not eat of it because you will die" is enough, i.e., truly understanding the dire consequences is enough to ensure obedience. But when death is an abstract concept not yet experienced or understood, it is not an effective incentive, and so to ensure obedience extra measures are put in place; hence, she compensates for her lack of understanding by adding the extra restriction. Furthermore, in her doing so it indicates a genuine desire to obey YHWH's command (just like rabbis building a fence around the Torah), but it is clear she does not fully understand why the command was given, and it is this weakness the snake exploits.

4 The snake said to the woman:

Die, you will not die!

5 Rather, God knows

that on the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened

and you will become like gods, knowing good and evil.

[144] Other possible explanations of how the woman understands the consequence include Fohrman (2011) postulating the woman's rendering suggest only a probability of death instead of its certainty, and Garza (2013) states the woman's use of *pen temutun* ("lest you die") instead of YHWH's *mowt tamut*, ("die, you shall die") indicates she understands the death would be sudden or immediate rather than at some later time, the latter of which is what YHWH's phrasing indicates (see n. 13 in Chapter 5 for further explanation on the timing of death in this command).

The snake does not challenge the woman on what she clearly understands, and instead challenges her on what she does not: death. While the snake began this discourse with incorrect statements about YHWH's command, here it accurately states what YHWH said ("you must die, yes, die), although negating it. Such phrasing would likely catch the attention of the woman, who may then recall it as the same emphatic manner in which YHWH spoke of death, and perhaps make her realize her understanding is incorrect. This shifts command of the conversation from the woman to the snake, as she recognizes it might understand the extent of the consequence of death better than she does, and therefore might be speaking truth.[145] The snake now seems to speak with authority on par with YHWH, which lends credence to its statements that 1) they[146] will *not* die (to whatever extent they understand that) and 2) the reality of what will happen when they do eat from the Tree, i.e., they will know good and evil just like YHWH. (To note, Fox (1995) translates *elohim* in v. 5 in the generic plural (as many Jewish sources do), i.e., as "gods," but in all other instances in the creation account it is translated as "God.")

Up to this point in the story the woman, again, has no reason (nor any neuroceptive input) to consider this good creature as untrustworthy or malicious, or that what it is saying is untrue (even if contrary to what YHWH stated), because her lack of knowledge, experience, and discernment prevents her from accurately assessing the veracity of the snake's closing statements. Furthermore, discussing and gathering information from others in the garden is not outside the realm of possibility (nor restricted by YHWH), especially regarding matters she does

[145] Curiously, it might also be considered that neither the humans *nor the animals* were allowed to eat from the tree, meaning the animals (ergo, the snake) knew of the prohibition, as it pertained to them as well. Or, perhaps, if the prohibition did only pertain to humans, the snake could have eaten from the Tree and has not only received the knowledge of good and evil, and is now using it against the woman, but also did not experience the death; hence, the snake knows of which it speaks. These ideas are *not* being asserted herein, but are rather examples of seeing the 70 faces of the Torah.

[146] Both the woman's use of "you" in v. 3 and the snake's use of "you" in vv. 4-5 are the singular plural form, indicating the silent presence of the man, i.e., the snake is speaking to more than just the woman.

not fully understand yet desires to learn. With that, another aspect to consider is that the snake takes advantage of the woman's curiosity and desire to obtain knowledge and experience, which is inherent in her current childlike state and stage of growth and development. Furthermore, YHWH is currently absent in the story, indicating she has also launched off of her secure base and is exploring her world with confidence, and has felt no reason to return to YHWH as a safe haven—further indicating she is unprotected. Given all this, her innocence, inexperience, and inherent curiosity and eagerness to learn is, indeed, setting her up for a fall. O'Connor (2018) touches upon these points in the following:

> According to the serpent, the most important thing about God is knowledge, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil. The text does not tell us what it means by good and bad, whether the couple is about to discover moral, spiritual, physical, or psychological goodness and badness. Until this point in the story, the snake implies, humans have lived in a uniform world, unaware of distinctions between good and bad. Humans are to the serpent no more than naive children. The woman listens to this with heightened awareness. . . (pp. 62-63)

The benefits of eating from the tree seem excellent—who would not want to be like YHWH and know all that he knows? Being like YHWH in knowing good and evil sounds like a good and helpful thing, not a bad or wrong thing, especially for the humans whose future is to co-rule and co-reign with YHWH. Therefore, this accelerated route to attaining such knowledge seems desirable.

However, the dominant narrative views this differently and often attributes to the woman (and the man) the desire to usurp God's authority, which would be rooted in pride. First, that is not the heart of a child towards their parent, who is instead idealized and can do no wrong

(Herman, 2015), but secondly, how can pride, which YHWH hates and opposes (see Proverbs 6:16-17; James 4:6), already be manifest in the woman (or man)? That is not possible in YHWH's very good creation. Assuming a prideful heart is reading back into the story what we experience in ourselves and others in an already fallen world, and assuming they are making choices based on what would be *our* motivations. At this point in the story there is nothing but goodness and innocence in operation, and the genuine, sincere desire to be *like* YHWH,[147] is a plausible reading, if not more so given the actual context of *shalom* in the garden and not reading anything into it from the context of our broken world.

Another assumption often made in the dominant narrative is that the snake portrays YHWH as a jealous God who does not want to share such knowledge or have anyone be like him in that regard, thus slandering his character (Fohrman, 2011). But this is also reading the story through our warped perspectives, and thus reading into the snake's statements the things we would think given the same situation. Portraying YHWH as jealous also presumes the woman would understand what jealousy means and that she possesses (like pride) jealousy within herself, or that she has experienced jealousy to know it and apply it to YHWH. Again, in a very good creation, and in the story thus far, there is no frame of reference for that to be possible. Furthermore, if what the snake says is true—which it is—and she will be like YHWH knowing good and evil, then YHWH's withholding it at this stage in their development is only a *good* thing because they would not be able to assimilate, manage, or even begin to understand such knowledge; therefore, the prohibition is to protect them (and not YHWH, as the snake is made to infer). However, at some point they will be able to absorb and use such knowledge, but first they

[147] We are also called to be *like* YHWH, e.g., see Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16, which is also implied (if not asserted) when Jesus, who is the exact representation of God, states multiple times, "Follow me." We are called to be like Jesus, and hopefully have the genuine desire to be so as the first man and woman did, as this reading proposes.

are to grow into that knowledge and assimilate it safely and steadily alongside YHWH. Lastly, as spoken of earlier, and even alluded to by the snake ("God knows *on the day* you eat from it"), there is a sense that eating of the tree is not for right now, but will be allowed later when the humans are ready to receive it and steward it well.

But, in the context of the story as given, with nothing but goodness and *shalom* within and among all creatures and relationships, we are left to wonder how the woman can be led to disobey, and I contend it was shrewdly done by enticing her good desire to gain more knowledge and be like YHWH, which is a good thing. The woman is already *like* YHWH in image, but she would understandably desire to be *more* like YHWH in knowledge and experience. With that, no more words need to be uttered by the snake (and none are) because the woman has been sufficiently enticed to consider and explore this forbidden tree.

It should be briefly noted there is an element of difference between being *enticed* and being *tempted*, as the latter is usually thought of at this point. Goldingay (2020) notes:

> Genesis doesn't say that the snake "tempts" the woman. Indeed, if "tempt" means "try to get someone to do the wrong thing," Hebrew does not have a word meaning "tempt" . . . The snake does not "tempt" the woman in the sense of suggesting something she might do (contrast Satan's "tempting" of Jesus). (comments on 3:1-7, para. 4).

Thus, tempting is getting someone to *do* something they clearly know is wrong. To use Goldingay's (2020) example of Jesus, the devil tempts Jesus to *do* overtly wrong things: "*tell* these stones…," "*throw* yourself down…," "*worship* me." In each instance Jesus recalls and counters with a command from the Torah that shuts down the temptation (and the devil). In the context of this story, the snake could tempt the woman to *do* an overtly wrong thing by stating, "*eat* from the tree, for you will be like God knowing good and evil," which would cause her to

recall the command, "do not eat from it," and the temptation (and the snake) would be shut down. Furthermore, such an approach, i.e., "*do* this," would activate her neuroception that something is amiss since the snake is trying to get her to overtly disobey a command—which would be not good—by just *telling her to do* the wrong thing, which would not be shrewd.

This may seem too subtle of a distinction, but the shrewdness lies in the subtlety of approach. To entice someone has more of a sense of luring by stoking desire, such as what was spoken of in the previous chapter with parents enticing infants to move towards an object out of reach, or to walk towards them by opening their arms and encouraging—i.e., enticing—the infant to walk towards that which they desire. Enticement can still lead people to do wrong, but it is not by making them overtly focus upon and choose the wrong, or by frankly telling them to do the wrong, it is getting them to follow their desire, for good or for bad. With that, in regard to those who are young, immature, and innocent, stoking good and natural desires, i.e., the desire to learn, grow, and become, is a good motivator to action, and, in this case, is what lies at the heart of deception. Furthermore, deception itself can be much more powerful than temptation, because at some point in the process of being deceived, acting upon desire no longer feels like a choice, but rather the right and good thing to do, and in the case of the woman, that right and good thing would be to eat of the Tree to be more like YHWH. Thus, the snake appealed to the woman's good desire to learn and know but did not suggest or force a course of action by telling her what to do, for that would not be shrewd. Instead, the woman considers the snake's words and acts on them because she thought the snake was trustworthy, safe, and being truthful, all while operating within the safe confines of the garden, and within the safety of her loving relationships with the man and YHWH. Given all that, what could really go wrong?[148] However, this was a perfect set-

[148] There is an implication here of the safety of relationships to absorb sin and the effects of sin. Meaning, even if something goes wrong, which it does in disobeying, the safety net of the secure relationships should still hold,

up for innocence to be betrayed.

6 The woman saw

that the tree was good for eating

and that it was a delight to the eyes,

and the tree was desirable to contemplate.

She took from its fruit and ate

and gave also to her husband beside her,

and he ate.

In beholding the tree, the woman saw what was true all along (i.e., more truth and more validation to act), as this harkens back to v. 2:7, where YHWH "caused to spring up from the soil every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat," and the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil was no exception; furthermore, YHWH never said the fruit was *not* good to eat, just that they could not eat it. Fox's (1995) rendering, "and the tree was desirable to contemplate," is most often translated as something akin to "desirable for obtaining wisdom (or to make one wise)," but as stated here it fits well with the image one may have of the woman as she "contemplates" the tree. As she considers all its aesthetic and nutritive qualities, it was also desirable to contemplate what wisdom and knowledge it potentially held for her, and it is from that moment of contemplation that she reaches out, takes, and eats, and also gives some to the man who is with her, who also eats.

Much is often made of "her husband beside her," because until this moment the man seems absent. But it is now revealed the man is "beside her" (or as other translations render it, "who was *with* (Heb., *immah*) her"), and that, plus the singular plural use of "you" spoken by

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forgive, heal, and restore. With that, since everything shatters, it is not the disobedience that tears it all asunder, it is the trauma of the experience and how it transforms the humans when left unresolved.

both the woman and the snake (as expressed in the Hebrew), indicates the man was present throughout the conversation (Trible, 1978). The common attribution given to the man is passivity, i.e., in being there throughout, and hearing the conversation between the woman and the snake, he offers no corrections (or says anything at all). However, based on the previous discussion of vv. 2-3, there was little to correct regarding the command, and it is possible the man, given his similar level of immaturity and lack of knowledge and experience, understood death in the same way as the woman, and was, therefore, likely in agreement with the extra layer of protection against eating from the tree. But the man's silent passivity has been thought by some to indicate he was too enamored by the woman (recall Genesis 2:23) to correct her statement, thus abdicating his responsibility (another common assumption) to protect her, and instead joins her in sinning. Still others see it differently as an act of defiance, rebellion, and, as stated before, pride. However, all of those motivations, actions, and character portrayals are not consonant with the goodness of all creation, the still innocent childlikeness of the humans (and their subsequent innocent thoughts and attitudes), and the secure and safe relationships that presently exist among all in the garden.

In summary, right up to this moment of eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil, it can be reasonably considered the humans felt safe in general, believed the snake was trustworthy and speaking truthfully and knowledgeably about the Tree and the consequences, and thus felt safe to proceed in eating from it (and perhaps were convinced it was the right and good thing to do). This does not simultaneously infer God was lying or not trustworthy, nor is there anything to suggest the humans thought or felt as much. The snake's shrewdness was effective to entice the curiosity and desire of two innocent and immature humans to partake of the fruit they were not supposed to, and in the next moment they would finally *know* why.

7 The eyes of the two of them were opened

and they knew then

that they were nude.

They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Many English translations present this verse as a singular and complete sentence that closes a paragraph. As a natural result of the complete sentence flow, many interpreters quickly connect all the elements and render this moment as the humans seeing their bodies and realizing their nakedness (i.e., becoming self-conscious), which is not incorrect, but doing so bypasses and misses what else may be happening in this moment mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. With that, consider how Fox (1995) structures this verse, because it is poignant. It is a prompt to pause and reflect on each of those elements and their significant implications, which is what will be considered in our discussion.

Eating the fruit had a definite and immediate effect: it opened their eyes. There is another time in a later biblical story where eyes were opened, that of the servant of the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 6:8-17:

> Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, "At such and such a place shall be my camp." But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Take care not to pass this place, for the Arameans are going down there." The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned a place so that it was on the alert.
>
> The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, "Now tell me: Who among us is betraying us to the king of Israel?" Then one of his officers said, "No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in

> Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber." He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him." He was told, "He is in Dothan." So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night and surrounded the city.
>
> When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (*NRSVue*, 2022)

In the garden everything was in a state of *shalom*; however, the presence of *ha'satan* was there, unseen and unrecognized by the humans. Just like Elisha's servant could only see the visible threat of encroaching adversarial forces, and not the presence of YHWH manifest in the chariots of fire encamped around them, the humans in the garden could only see the visible goodness of creation and the presence of YHWH, and not the adversarial forces around them. This harkens to Ephesians 6:12: "for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (*NRSVue,* 2022). This reality—this knowledge of good and evil—is what the humans would eventually have come to see and understand while living and learning safely alongside YHWH. YHWH was to be the one to open their eyes when they were mature enough to safely assimilate and integrate such truth into their experience of life. But truth given too soon can be traumatizing. To illustrate, I will share a personal story.

Once upon a time I was visiting with some friends at their house, which was always

abuzz with activity given their several young children running about. We were all in the living room with the television on in the background playing a video of one of the gospel stories, which had reached the scene at Calvary. I recall thinking, as did the mom who voiced it, that maybe the kids (all under the age of five at the time) should not watch the crucifixion. Their children had been appropriately sheltered in life and were not exposed to violence on television or otherwise. However, their dad seemed to think it would be alright in this circumstance because it was the truth of what happened to Jesus, so in a sense he thought it was important they see and know the truth of what took place. I stopped focusing on the video and started watching their oldest son, who was standing right in front of the television and utterly transfixed—eyes wide open—as the events at Calvary played out and drew him in. I cannot remember the exact moment in the scene, whether it was the nail driven through the wrist or the excruciating scream and grimace of Jesus, but their son became terrified, starting crying, wheeled around looking for a safe haven, and then ran to his dad, who immediately welcomed him in and attempted to soothe his son. Through his sobs I could hear the questions of "What's happening? Why are they doing that to Jesus?" His dad was calm and understanding and tried to explain. The son had grown up with the story of Jesus, including his death, but—as with the humans in the garden—he did not truly know what death was, nor had witnessed or experienced it prior. His dad explained what he was seeing was the story he had been told, and this was the death of Jesus. The son occasionally glanced back to the still running video as his dad spoke, but the visuals were too overwhelming, and each time he would turn back and hide his face in his dad's chest. The boy eventually calmed down in his dad's care, and then he launched off again to play elsewhere. The truth was traumatizing, but in this case his dad mitigated the effects and brought some resolution for his son; although, I imagine he still had some unvoiced and unanswered questions. The truth visualized was

overwhelming and confusing, and given the emotional upheaval it caused, it probably created a memory for him, but not necessarily a traumatic one given the efforts of his dad. Unfortunately, that was not the case for the man and the woman.

In eating the fruit their eyes were opened wide to see and receive all of what they had not seen and known before. What if, like Elisha's servant, they were able to see those adversarial forces they had not seen or known of previously? What if they could now see *ha'satan* transposed over the snake, staring at their vulnerable nakedness—which would also make them painfully aware of it—while observing the fruit of its deception: innocence lost; the *arum* took it from their *arumin*.[149] What if, in that moment, all of the rest of the knowledge of good and evil they were to learn over time came flooding into their still immature and undeveloped minds? And what if, but surely so, they realized in that moment the depth of the mistake they made in disobeying YHWH's command and eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil? It would have been utterly unexpected and completely overwhelming and confusing and beyond their experiential or developmental capacity to cope with it rationally or effectively, i.e., traumatizing. Furthermore, it would also be shame inducing.

With their neuroception fully activated, the man and woman are experiencing feelings and sensations they had not felt before, which only adds to their overwhelm and confusion that came with the flood of knowledge. The primary feeling and sensation is shame, which American psychiatrist Curt Thompson (2015) describes as an "actual *neuropsychological state* we enter when we experience it" (pp. 23-24), and is "the *felt sense that I do not have what it takes to tolerate this moment or circumstance"* (p. 25). Let us pause for a moment to differentiate between shame and guilt, given the latter is significantly associated with the doctrine of original

[149] To clarify, and refer back to remarks made in the discussion of v. 3:1a, the *shrewdness* (*arum*) of the snake effectively took the innocence from their *nudeness* (*arumin*).

sin. While the humans are guilty of disobeying YHWH's command, guilt is not what they are feeling, sensing, or responding to in the moment.

> Researchers have described *shame* as a feeling that *is deeply associated with a person's sense of self* [emphasis added], apart from any interactions with others; *guilt*, on the other hand, emerges as a result of something I have done that negatively affects someone else. Guilt is something I feel because I have *done* something bad. Shame is something I feel because I *am* bad. In fact, when in its grip, *it is quite difficult for us to separate our self from the shame that we are feeling* [emphasis added]. Guilt, on the other hand, only emerges when a child's brain is mature enough (around three to six years) to be aware that his or her behavior negatively affects the emotional state of another. Furthermore, a necessary element of the emotion we call guilt includes empathy, if even in primitive form. In order for me to feel guilt, I must in some way simultaneously feel the pain I have caused for another. In this sense guilt tends to draw my attention to another and is often accompanied by a desire to resolve the problem by being closer to him or her (admitting a wrongdoing, seeking and being offered forgiveness). *Shame, on the other hand, separates me from others, as my awareness of what I feel is virtually consumed with my own internal sensations* [emphasis added]. Furthermore, they are related in that I will sense shame in addition to the guilt I feel when I do something "wrong." Hence, in one sense, neurodevelopmentally guilt stands on shame's shoulders. One way to think of this is that we can experience shame without guilt but are unlikely to experience guilt without shame. (Thompson, 2015, p. 63)

In the prior state of *shalom* among and within all relationships in the garden, there was no hint of any relational breach that would have given the humans an experience of being hurt, violated, or

having their trust betrayed, nor being the cause of such for others, so they have no experiential (or neurodevelopmental) capacity to draw from to experience guilt, feel guilty, or be drawn to repair the breach they caused with YHWH in this act of disobedience. This does not negate the guilt or responsibility they bear for disobeying; it is to show they have had no capacity or frame of reference from which to understand it. However, shame is something felt regardless of guilt, which is what the humans are feeling deeply—that felt sense [they] do not have what it takes to tolerate this moment or circumstance—which serves to shatter their sense of self.

Being created inherently good, and experiencing a secure attachment with YHWH, the humans had an integrated and coherent sense of self, i.e., a sense of themselves as whole, good, confident, safe, and at peace, and, furthermore, they were unashamed. The traumatizing experience of eating from the Tree effectively serves to change that sense of self and state of being, especially since YHWH was not there to mitigate the trauma, therefore they were *alone and unsupported* in the experience. The act of deception that exploited their innocence and vulnerability now registers within them as *something inherently wrong with them*, i.e., their sense of self is now informed by the message: "I am bad and I caused this bad thing to happen" (Herman, 2015). This is the conclusion children draw when abused, neglected, or otherwise violated or traumatized (as discussed with insecure attachments), and such would be the conclusion drawn by the (once) innocent, inexperienced, and childlike humans. Therefore, as it relates to the concept of original sin, something *did* happen internally—but not metaphysically—with this act of disobedience that served to corrupt: unmitigated trauma shattered their sense of self, which shifted their perception of themselves from that of being coherent and inherently good, to that of being corrupt and inherently bad. Recall that the latter is what the Reformers label *original sin.* Furthermore, and as has been seen and will be shown, this traumatized state

does engender behaviors that are sinful, particularly sin as relational breach.

So, what are they to do now? They have never before been in such a situation or felt this way to know. But one thing they do know now is they are naked, exposed, and vulnerable, which is the very thing that was exploited. The snake saw their vulnerability, and now the humans can see it in themselves and each other, and they likely despise it as the cause of their problems, i.e., they are now naked and *ashamed*. Their innocence and vulnerability, represented in part by their nakedness, was the reason they were deceived and chose to disobey and, as a result, experienced trauma; therefore, it is no longer good. Furthermore, as a result of trauma, their nervous system has shifted them into survival mode, where the first course of action is to protect the self. Given that their nakedness is not good and was the (representative) source of their trouble, trauma, and shame, it must be covered up to protect from further harm. No longer feeling safe in their own bodies or in the presence of one another—and assuredly not with the presence of the snake or anything else in the garden now—they sewed fig leaves together to cover up their vulnerability. Their once innocent nakedness was now defiled.

> **8 Now they heard the sound of YHWH, God, (who was) walking about in the garden at the breezy-time of the day.**
>
> **And the human and his wife hid themselves from the face of YHWH, God, amid the trees of the garden.**

Some may wonder why the humans did not run to their safe haven in YHWH. As stated above, shame separates. The profound experience of shame has the humans consumed by their overwhelming internal sensations and in a neurological state of survival that subverts rational thought. Thus, shame sabotaged what would have been a normal response to seek safety and help in YHWH. Furthermore, the humans did disobey YHWH, a realization that would not be lost on

them that may add to their shame and a sense of self as bad. In creation vernacular, the humans are no longer good, and can no longer consider themselves part of an otherwise very good creation with a good God. The sense of shame people feel is a significant reason many think themselves unworthy to come to YHWH, and they effectively hide from YHWH, which would be the case for the humans here as well.

However, while shame has a significant influence on the humans' behavior, so does the effect of trauma, and perhaps more so.

> *Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships* [emphasis added]. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relationship to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.
>
> The damage to the relational life is not a secondary effect of trauma, as originally thought. Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community. . . . *Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of self, and the meaningful order of creation* [emphasis added]. (Herman, 2015, p. 51)

With their entire world and sense of self shattered by trauma, as well as experiencing the betrayal of trust and innocence inherent in the deception, everyone (to include themselves) and everything can be perceived as unsafe, even YHWH. Therefore, the sound of YHWH walking about in the garden may feel more like a threat than a source of comfort, and hiding from him becomes a

default response (in both shame and trauma).

9 YHWH, God, called to the human and said to him:

Where are you?

It would be hard to believe YHWH did not know where the humans were hiding and, furthermore, that he is unaware of what transpired in the garden.[150] Therefore, already knowing what has happened and where the humans were hiding, as well as the reason why, YHWH's question demonstrates mercy, compassion, and the sensitivity necessary in approaching the shamed and traumatized humans. To ask the question is to invite the human to come out of hiding and engage with YHWH who is seeking to reconnect with him (and the woman). YHWH knows the humans have disobeyed, and he knows where they are hiding, and as God and Creator he could just present himself before them and demand an accounting. But, while that is the character associated with many Ancient Near Eastern gods, that is not the character of YHWH God, and, furthermore, the humans were not created to be obedient vassals to a suzerain lord. The humans (and all humans) were created to be in an intimate relationship with YHWH; therefore, obedience (or lack thereof) to a command does not supersede nor control and dictate the relationship. However, the command was given within the context of their relationship, and the disobedience is painful and grievous to YHWH, who not only experienced a breach of trust and a relational injury as well, but also experiences the pain and grief of knowing his beloved humans are shamed and traumatized, and their relationships have been fractured as a result. But YHWH remains consistent in his character and way of being with the humans, and so in a merciful and compassionate (i.e., co-suffering) way he is seeking to repair the breach and restore

[150] For many this realization raises the question of why YHWH would let this happen if he knew it was happening. However, while a good and valid question, it gets into theological areas, e.g., divine providence and theodicy, that are beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation.

the humans.

10 He said:

I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid, because I am nude,

and so I hid myself.

11 He said:

Who told you that you are nude?

From the tree about which I command you not to eat,

have you eaten?

12 The human said:

The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree,

and so I ate.

13 YHWH, God, said to the woman:

What is this that you have done?

The woman said:

The snake enticed me,

and so I ate.

The response to YHWH's initial invitation and subsequent questions are reflective of the trauma and shame the humans are experiencing. The question of “Where are you?” is not met with, “here I am.” The human does not come out of hiding but rather speaks from his hiding place. His response indicates the trauma and shame that is in control, i.e., he is afraid and feels exposed, too vulnerable to present himself to YHWH given his recent experiences. It is a missed opportunity for a redemptive and restorative encounter with YHWH, but such is the nature of trauma and shame as they create separation. Their effects further rob the afflicted from

connection, creativity, and life, and instead bring about disconnection, uncreation (i.e., the undoing of self), and death. As spoken of in Chapter 4, we are formed in and through relationships, i.e., we are brought to life and continue to live through relationship, but trauma fractures relationship, and therefore brings death through disconnection. The snake's deception was intended to bring about death through disobedience—a disobedience that traumatized, and the unresolved trauma is the death sentence. Indeed, *mowt tamut,* you shall surely die.

YHWH reaches out again with more questions, which are often interpreted as accusatory, but can still be heard as compassionate and an invitation to connect. Instead of accusation, hear the concern in the question, "Who told you that you were nude?" There is a sense of pain in the way YHWH asks it, knowing the human has been violated and deceived, his innocence betrayed. But that question may be too painful to answer as it places the human back in the traumatic moment of realization, and accordingly, the human does not answer it. YHWH also offers a more pragmatic question, one that is easier to answer and perhaps through which the human will engage and acknowledge what happened, for to begin the repair and healing from trauma there needs to be an acknowledgement and an entering into it. YHWH's questions are those opportunities to do so. But the human is not ready, and the questions are likely painful, pouring salt into very fresh wounds, and hence the response is one of "fight." Like a wounded animal in its cage that cannot be coaxed to come out, reaching in—as YHWH does with his questions—evokes a protective fight response. "In an experience of trauma, the fight/flight or freeze responses are triggered when our normal capacities and resources to cope with a situation are overwhelmed" (Warner et al., 2019, p. 49). The flight response hid him, but now the questions are proving overwhelming as well in his traumatized state, so with nowhere else to flee, fighting back is the next viable option.

Warner et al. (2019) note that the aftermath of trauma caused by a significant betrayal of trust (such as the humans experienced) "is complicated by questions of fault, blame and shattered identity that exacerbate the relational ruptures that are the inevitable product of trauma" (p. 4). This is evident in the human's response as he fights back against what he likely feels is a personal attack (rather than an invitation to come forward and heal), and deflects the attention to protect himself as he places blame—and hopefully the attention—onto the woman, while implicitly blaming YHWH as well. In what can be considered an act of resignation because the human is not open to connecting and engaging, YHWH does shift the attention and asks the woman (who is also still in hiding) what it is that she has done, which is another invitation. The woman's response seems to come with a flat affect, truthful yet emotionless, and in her own state of shame and trauma—which is ineffable—she offers a minimum data set (Caruth, 1996). The humans are too traumatized and filled with shame to discuss the traumatizing event or reconnect with YHWH, which is assuredly painful and grievous given the consequences that then will ensue as a result of failing to repair the relational breach with YHWH.

This next section of the story, Genesis 3:14-24, will be discussed with more brevity, as the bulk of the argument for trauma as an efficient cause of sin (as relational breach) and resultant sinful behaviors (in the form of trauma responses), has already been presented. However, there is more that is applicable to the thesis, and will be discussed accordingly as we draw the chapter to a close.

14 YHWH, God, said to the snake:

Because you have done this,

damned be you from all the animals and from all the living-things of the field;

upon your belly shall you walk and dust shall you eat, all the days of your life.

15 I put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed:
They will bruise you on the head, you will bruise them in the heel.

For all the questions asked, there are none asked of the snake. YHWH knows what has happened and where the blame really lies and the deep deception that has occurred. The snake does not have a relationship with YHWH that the humans do; the animals are not his image bearers. Therefore, the curse (here "damned") that falls upon the snake is potentially a kind of morphing from its original design to better reflect its inherent nature and the danger it can be. The presence and problem of deceit and deception is a persistent theme throughout Scripture—arguably more so than the theme of sin or sinning[151]—which begins in this story and finds its end at the cross and Revelation; therefore, this morphing of the snake into a slithering entity is a good representation of such deception and a future warning to be wary of it for all who see it.

Verse 15 is traditionally and widely interpreted as YWHW speaking through the snake to satan, and to the rescue that will eventually come through the woman's seed, Jesus. Indeed, Jesus is our savior and the solution to the problem of sin, as well as its cause, trauma, which will be discussed in Chapter 7. Furthermore, in Jesus saving us from sin, he also conquers the deceiver that did the initial (or *original*) deceiving that ultimately ushered in sin and death. One might say more fully that Jesus saves us from sin, death, satan, and deception.

16 To the woman he said:
I will multiply, multiply your pain (from) your pregnancy,
with pains shall you bear children.

[151] To note, it is deception that is specifically mentioned in this story, and the first occurrence of any Hebrew word denoting sin begins in Genesis 4:7b in regard to Cain: "...sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (*NRSVue,* 2022), which also indicates that he *can* master it, and is not an inherent nature. To add, sin results from deception (and also perpetuates deception), but the concern of being deceived or being deceitful is a persistent theme in Israel's story, seen often in Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets, as well as in Paul's letters.

Toward your husband will be your lust, yet he will rule over you.

17 To Adam he said,

Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife

and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying:

You are not to eat from it!

Damned be the soil on your account,

with painstaking labor shall you eat from it, all the days of your life.

18 Thorn and sting-shrub let it spring up for you,

when you (seek to) eat the plants of the field!

19 By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,

until you return to the soil,

for from it you were taken.

For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Many believe these so-called punishments handed down to Adam (this is the first time he is named)[152] and the woman are curses, but they are not, and only the snake and the ground are cursed. There is no cursing of YHWH's image bearers. These are instead the unfortunate consequences reflective of the fracturing of all relationships within the garden because of trauma and its lack of resolution. One cannot force people to acknowledge and work through their trauma, not even YHWH. It is a process and a choice to heal, and the humans' trauma was too deep and intense for it to be ameliorated at this point in the story. The humans were alone in their experience, which was the crux of the trauma and subsequent shame, and it becomes internalized

[152] Notably, while the name is narrated in the story, YHWH has not and does not use his name, nor does he in the remainder of the story when speaking to or of the man. This can further indicate, or at least represent, the breach of relationship (i.e., the disconnection) between the man and YHWH.

and has had a profoundly negative transformative effect on the humans that manifests in dysfunctional and sinful behavior that then perpetuate relational breaches, trauma, and more sin in their own lives and then into successive generations. However, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, trauma can begin to be resolved and healed at any time it becomes acknowledged—and made safe to be acknowledged—and a healing process initiated. Furthermore, any form of insecure attachment can also be addressed, made sense of, and secure attachment attained, thereby changing insecure patterns of attachment behaviors (which can also be sinful) to secure ones (which will not be sinful). However, none of that is what is seen in the closing verses of the second act of this drama.

In v. 16, many traditionalists consider this is the cause of pain in childbearing. However, the human body is designed to feel pain, which is a *good* thing, for without pain there is no means by which to know when something is wrong physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Childbirth is physically traumatizing as it tears tissues and stresses joints; it is naturally painful and not a consequence of disobedience or trauma. However, pain is better managed in a non-traumatized state, so by virtue of the woman's experiences, it may *feel* more painful (as pain is a subjective experience). But there is also the pain of child*rearing* that can be derived from the verse as well, as bearing and raising children rends physical and heart tissues. This reality will be made more manifest in the fact that, *without resolving and healing her trauma*, the woman (as well as the man) will pass that trauma onto the next generation in some form of insecure attachment or overtly traumatizing behavior (which can be seen demonstrated in their first-born son in the early events of Genesis 4). Lastly, the ending of v.16 speaks to the unrepaired relational breach that now exists between the man and the woman, the consequences of which also result from the unresolved trauma, as the dysfunctional relational dynamics that began as

post-traumatic responses will internalize and become a relational norm. This, too, will be passed down transgenerationally.

The first half of v. 17 speaks to the relational breach between Adam and YHWH. Even if the humans were in agreement (and perhaps YHWH as well) with how to avoid eating from the Tree, and even if they both listened to the snake's deceptive statements and were both deceived, they each had their own decision to make in choosing to eat, and their own responsibility to bear with it. Adam blamed the woman, as well as YHWH, and took no ownership for his action,[153] whereas the woman did; therefore, we do not hear YHWH call out her actions like he does with Adam. In a sense YHWH reflects Adam's own words back to him, calling him to account. The blame Adam places on the woman is a veiled admission that he "hearkened unto her" and not to YHWH, and YHWH reflects that back to the man when he says, "you have hearkened to the voice of your wife" and not me, which places responsibility on Adam for the relational breach that now exists between he and YHWH—a breach that is apparently never repaired.[154] With that, what was intended to be a joyful labor in tending YHWH's creation will now be resentful, painful toil. Indeed, even creation suffers under the effects of the humans' trauma, and it is as if the ground reflects back such a disposition in Adam with the production of thorns and thistles, and the ground is no longer amenable without significant work and effort. The effects of trauma in Adam impact creation in such a way that it, too, experiences being cut off from a life-giving relationship with the man, and barrenness and desolation begin to appear, i.e., the undoing of creation. The ending of the verse speaks to the full effect of the uncreation effect by humans

[153] While this is sinful behavior, this is still consonant with his trauma response, which demonstrates how trauma manifests in sinful behavior.

[154] One can consider some repair occurred between the woman and YHWH given her honesty, as evidenced in Genesis 4:1 when she first gives birth and says, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord," (*NRSVue*, 2022) and then again in v. 25 stating, "God has appointed for me another child…" (*NRSVue*, 2022). These are statements affirming their relationship; by contrast, we do not hear from Adam again, let alone anything about his relationship to YHWH. Furthermore, and not inconsequentially, his lineage is full of trauma, discord, and sin.

returning to dust in death.

20 The human called his wife's name: Ḥavva/Life-giver!

For she became the mother of all the living.

21 Now YHWH, God, made Adam and his wife coats of skin and clothed them.

Given the extent of trauma and the death it has wrought within the humans and all their relationships in the garden, the naming of Havva is more pragmatic than holistic. She will bring forth new life in the form of children, however life itself is no longer flourishing and abundant as YHWH intended it to be.

Verse 21 is traditionally viewed as when death enters the world, as it is assumed YHWH kills animals, i.e., sheds blood, to cloth (or cover) the humans. There is nothing in the text to indicate YHWH killed or sacrificed any animals, and this is reading back into the text Israel's sacrificial systems and atonement theories. Such discussions are beyond our scope herein; however, it is important to note that, even if this was an instance of animal death, it is not the first instance of death in the story, as that was brought on by the trauma that disconnected the humans from their source of life in relationship with YHWH, their own selves, each other, and the rest of creation. Therefore, any animal death at this point would be more of a consequence of prior death, and not its entry point into the story or the world. Lastly, this act of YHWH demonstrates his continued care, compassion, and concern for the humans, as well as a lack of condemnation, and the desire to provide a better protective covering for them to replace their meager efforts.

22 YHWH, God, said:

Here, the human has become like one of us, in knowing good and evil.

So now, lest he send forth his hand

and take also from the Tree of Life

and eat

and live throughout the ages...!

23 So YHWH, God, sent him away from the garden of Eden, to work the soil from which he had been taken.

24 He drove the human out

and caused to dwell, eastward of the garden of Eden,

the winged-sphinxes and the flashing, ever-turning sword

to watch over the way to the Tree of Life.

Verse 22a affirms the resultant state of eating from the Tree: the human, but also the woman, are like YHWH in knowing good and evil.[155] However, such knowledge was devastating to acquire, both in the manner it came and the magnitude of it that was (and still is) beyond their developmental capacity to cope with and manage.

A traditional interpretation of this section from v. 22b on renders these concluding acts as merciful on the part of YHWH, as preventing access to the Tree of Life prevents the humans from eternally living in a persistent state of sinfulness, i.e., physical death is a mercy to a body possessed by the sinful nature; furthermore, it also shows that physical death will/did eventually come as YHWH said it would when the humans ate of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. Although, to state again, spiritual death and the death of self through disconnection occurred much sooner. But in looking through the lens of trauma, these consequential actions of YHWH are still merciful, because in a paradoxical way it prevents the ability to continue to live in a state of death. To eat from the Tree of Life continues to give life to the trauma, and to live life in a

[155] Fox (1995), as well as many translations, utilize "us," which can indicate YHWH and the divine beings of the heavenly host who would also possess the knowledge of good and evil.

perpetual state of trauma is to live in hell. With that, to be removed from the garden itself (rather than just barring access to only the Tree of Life) is also merciful, compassionate, and caring. To reframe, the garden is no longer a safe place and is filled with potentially activating memories (i.e., *triggers*) at every turn that do not need to be relived or kept alive by eating from the Tree of Life or continuing to live in the garden. Starting over east of Eden is therefore a merciful blessing that has great potential, especially because YHWH goes with them. He is always EHYEH/I-WILL-BE-THERE with them (and us), even if they do not (or cannot) feel it, perceive it, or perhaps even desire it—and thus remain turned away from YHWH—he is *still* there *with* them.

Conclusion

The first drama of the Bible ends here, however, the resultant "drama" from the "original" trauma sustained in the garden has continued on for millennia. As already mentioned, "[t]rauma breeds further trauma; hurt people hurt other people" (van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 348-349), and such was the case for Adam and Havva. The unresolved trauma and shame they carried within themselves and out of the garden will (and did) impact their current and future relationships, first between each other, and, more significantly, with their children, as evidenced in the relationship between their sons, Cain and Abel. As discussed in Chapter 4, unresolved trauma in parents is a key contributor to insecure attachments in their children. Those attachment traumas then breed their own trauma and insecure attachment behavior in the children and within their own developing relationships, and when they become parents—if left unresolved—the transgenerational transmission of those attachment behaviors and trauma will continue on.

It is hopefully now much clearer to see how the original *and unresolved* trauma of the

garden set off a cycle of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, and how all of it manifests in sinful behavior to varying degrees. However, such behaviors are symptoms of the internalized trauma from relational breaches from birth through adulthood, or even single-event traumas, as evidenced by the experience of the first humans. But because the original trauma of the garden has long since lost its context, thousands of years of these sinful (i.e., insecure and/or trauma-related) behaviors have made it look like humanity has an inherently sinful nature. But the manifestly important difference between a supposed sinful nature and a traumatized one is that the former is considered immutable (and will be passed on as such), while the latter can be fully healed, resolved, and the human restored to its full reflection as the image bearer of God, which stops the transgenerational transmission of insecurity, trauma, sin, and death, and replaces them with security, healing, restoration, and life.

Conclusions and Solutions

The doctrine of original sin posits that the disobedience of the first humans, in and of itself, utterly corrupted human nature and immutably transformed it, however, there is no efficient cause of exactly *how* the act of disobedience brought about such transformation of human nature, i.e., it is a theory rooted in metaphysical speculation, but, nonetheless, people believe it is empirically verifiable given the abundant evidence of sin in the world. However, something *did* happen with the act of disobedience, and something did (and does) disrupt and corrupt the humans—but not their essential nature of goodness and not *in toto*. The humans were immature, imperfect, and innocent, and capable of being corrupted (just like every human since). Their experience of deception that led to disobedience that resulted in eating from the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil was an utterly traumatizing and shame-inducing experience that manifested itself in physiological and neuropsychological changes that drove them into normal and expected trauma, shame, and survival responses, much of which can look like sin: fighting back, blaming, unwilling to accept responsibility, divisiveness, setting oneself against another, and turning away from God (to note, it is never YHWH God who turns away from them, or us). What we have read in the story in Genesis 3 plays out in our lives today, and the "sinful" responses we see from the humans are the same responses we see today, but their source is not an inherently sinful nature, it is a traumatized one that has been passed along intergenerationally and transgenerationally.

It is important to note I am *not* exchanging an *inherently* sinful nature for an *inherently* traumatized nature. To make that claim is to state we are born inherently traumatized, which is just as hopeless as being born with a sinful nature. What I am saying is that trauma is an efficient

cause for much of the sin we see in the world, but it is not inherent, it is not inherited,[156] and it is not immutable. Trauma can be healed, and a human can be restored, and sin can be abated, and the image of God can be reflected more fully. But the traumatized need the agency to heal, which a sinful nature paradigm negates. Under the paradigm of a sinful nature, sin is as sin does because we are sin (per the maximalist Reformed view). Under the paradigm of trauma, trauma will beget trauma—until we acknowledge and heal it—and then it stops the cycle. For some people, they may never have the opportunity to heal, and part of the reason is how the reality of trauma has been buried for so long, and there is still a battle for full awareness and acceptance. People cannot heal what is not revealed, and if trauma is dismissed, the efficient cause is missed and goes untreated. But the Church can do its part to help reveal and heal by changing the highly influential theological narrative from that of an inherent sinful nature that is to be despised and condemned, to that of a traumatized human that needs to be carefully and sensitively brought into the light, acknowledged, accepted and made to feel safe, but then healed and restored. The former paradigm *never* has a chance of diminishing or eradicating sin, or bringing about the restoration of all things, while the latter *does.*

Restorative Theology

From the beginning of my doctoral studies in Restorative Theology, one theme emerged and persisted, which is that for theology to be restorative we must restore (or reformulate) some theology. In considering the role of theology, it may prove helpful to establish a working definition of *theology* because, as Reformed American theologian and professor Kevin Vanhoozer (2014) states, "theology admits of many definitions" (p. 4), and he provides several for consideration, such as: "theology is the art and science of living well to God. [It] is the

[156] Notwithstanding epigenetics research that does speak to some inheritability of trauma, however that, too, can be addressed and healed.

serious and joyful attempt to live blessedly with others, before God, in Christ, through the Spirit" (Preface, para. 9), as well as "enacting the mind of Christ everywhere, at all times, and to everyone" (p. 5). Furthermore, "theology helps disciples to display the *lived* knowledge of the gospel: the mind of Christ embodied and embedded in particular situations" (Vanhoozer, 2014, pp. 4-5). Lastly,

> [p]ublic theology is the church's demonstration of life in Christ—to the glory of God and for the sake of the world. When the people of God display a flourishing life in obedience to Christ in the power of the Spirit, they both glorify God and demonstrate the power and wisdom of the gospel to the world. (Vanhoozer, 2014, p. 7)

This latter quotation resonates strongly with Volf and Croasmun (2019), which was quoted in Chapter 2 but is worth repeating here:

> We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The flourishing of human beings and all God's creatures in the presence of God is God's foremost concern for creation and should therefore be the central purpose of theology. (p. 11)

Given these offerings, one can glean our theology is to be active, engaging, and other-centered, and is, most importantly, to be efficacious in transforming individuals and communities so that the mind of Christ is *embodied* and then *embedded* into all situations to promote the flourishing of *all* creation. In considering all of this, I will follow Vanhoozer's lead and eschew forming a singular definition of theology in favor of highlighting the effects theology should have in our individual lives and communities, notably, even (or especially) while living in hostile territory and/or amidst adversity. Our theology should promote rich relationality (with God and others), always be life-giving (thus doing no harm), and be lived out for the sake of the world (other-

centered activity that promotes flourishing and abundant life for all), all of which can only be empowered by God, in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit.

But Volf and Croasmun (2019) contend that "Christian theology has lost its way because it has neglected its purpose" (p. 11)—or perhaps it has forgotten its purpose—and while there can be multiple reasons why, I believe the dominant Western Christian theology that has been built upon the doctrine of original sin is one for consideration (and why I believe it needs to be reformulated). The negative anthropology inherent to the doctrine, which when believed and internalized harms our self-concept, our concept of others, and potentially our concept of God, fails to promote rich relationality with others and God that effectively deprives people of life, and instead facilitates a process of relational, spiritual, emotional, and even physical death by driving disconnection. But such is the result when sin is the focus (that only leads to death), and not Jesus (who always brings life). When we focus on sin we (albeit somewhat paradoxically) get more sin, but when we focus on Jesus—and specifically the *life* of Jesus—we get more of Jesus (and less sin). If we are going to help people flourish through being healed, transformed, and restored—which is the essence of salvation—we need to restore some of our theology, to include our soteriology, by restoring Jesus to his rightful place at the center of it. Notably, some will argue such theology *is* centered on Jesus; however, the focus is almost exclusively on his death on the cross as payment for the penalty of sin, i.e., the atonement mechanism when sin is viewed as a debt and a crime. However, when the essential nature of sin is understood as a relational breach, the mechanism of atonement then becomes repairing and restoring the relationship.[157] With that, we must decenter the death-dealing focus on sin in our theology and

[157] If it is essential to one's soteriology that sin is both a debt and crime that was dealt with at the cross, that can remain; however, what must be added for a fuller and efficacious soteriology is the understanding of sin as a relational breach with God that must be restored. These understandings of sin and mechanisms of atonement need not be mutually exclusive.

re-center it on the resurrected and risen Jesus and upon developing a life-giving and restorative relationship with and in him. In short, for theology to be efficacious it must be centered and dependent upon an actual relationship with God, in Christ, and through the Spirit, and characterized by secure attachment. God is not a set of religious beliefs and propositions (i.e., doctrines) to which we mentally assent, and, furthermore, assimilation of such information does not bring about true healing and transformation (although possessing correct knowledge is important). As has been shown with attachment theory, it is only through *relationship* (because *we are relationship*) that we are formed and transformed—for good or for bad—but with God (who is also relationship as Three-in-One) it will always be for our good and the good of the world. With that, not only does our hamartiology need reforming and restoring, so does our soteriology.

What follows will only be what amounts to a brief overview of the concept of attachment as salvation and the Church's facilitation of it for the benefit of practical application regarding what has been discussed in this dissertation. The reader is referred to Wilder's (2020) text on this very subject, *Renovated: God, Dallas Willard, and the Church that Transforms*, as well as Allen's (2013) text, *Mentalizing in the Development and Treatment of Attachment Trauma*, that focuses on treatment principles that are directly applicable to the soteriology of attachment.

A Soteriology of Attachment

As has been presented, when people are traumatized, as part of the trauma response they lose their sense of safety and basic trust in relationships and disconnect to self-protect, which can often include disconnecting from God, but especially so when trauma is coupled with shame as was demonstrated by the humans in their posttraumatic states in the garden. But God is the one with whom we must relate to bring about healing and restoration, as well as be transformed unto

Christ (Jesus must be our developmental *telos*; King, 2016). However, our ability to perceive and relate to God in such a healing and transformative way requires us to be in a neurological state of safety and security, which is the case when relating with any human, as well. Therefore, the process of transformation and restoration, i.e., our salvation, requires attaining (or reattaining) secure attachment to God (and others). As Dallas Willard stated prior to his death, "I know of no soteriology [doctrine of salvation] based on forming a new attachment with God." (Wilder, 2020, p. 1); but he was convinced of it, as am I, and it is what the Church needs to embrace and incorporate into its theology so it can be efficacious in the context of such a traumatized world. The next question then becomes, how does the Church facilitate secure attachment to God? Specifically, how can the Church become a place where people feel *seen*, *soothed*, and *safe*, and experience contingent communication on a consistent enough basis, with relational breaches sufficiently repaired therein, to reap the healing and transformative benefits of secure attachment within themselves?

Facilitating Secure Attachment

American psychiatrist Judith Herman has outlined several essential elements and inherent stages of recovery from trauma that can be used as a guide for facilitating secure attachment to God, and thereby facilitate healing and transformation of the self. Herman's (2015) essential elements of recovery are as follows: 1) it must (and can only) take place within the context of healing relationships, 2) a sense of safety must be established, 3) people's stories must be told, heard, and any losses mourned, 4) they must reconnect with self and others, and 5) people need a supportive community of commonality to which to belong. Because these are essential elements of recovery from trauma, and we live in an overtly traumatized world, they must be (or become) inherent characteristics of the Church (and its theology). We will consider each separately, yet

they all exist in reciprocating relationships to one another. To note, Herman's (2015) work deals with more egregious forms of trauma (e.g., sexual abuse and domestic violence), and so any forthcoming quoted material will contain such verbiage as *survivor* and *victim*, but do not let that dissuade from noting its applicability to the Church or any other relational context. These elements are basic to psychological, emotional, spiritual, and even physical healing. Furthermore, we are all survivors and victims—and even perpetrators—of various forms of trauma and relational injury, and, therefore, these essential elements of recovery still apply to our own processes of healing, transformation, and restoration.

Healing Relationships. The following statement from Herman (2015) provides an excellent summation of the need for healing relationships:

> Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. [In renewing] connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities of trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are originally formed in relationships with other people, *they must be reformed in such relationships* [emphasis added]" (p. 133).

As can be seen, Herman (2015) draws upon the formative and reformative nature of attachment, and that while we can be hurt, or even "damaged and deformed" in relationship (e.g., attachment trauma),[158] we can also—and only—be healed in relationship. As we speak of attaining secure attachment to God, in Christ, and through the Spirit, and that primary relationship being integral

[158] This phrasing of "damaged and deformed" harkens back to the discussion on the nature of iniquity (*avon*) in Chapter 2, where *avon* means "to be bent" or made distorted, but can also represent the resultant state of a person after being directed away from an originally healthy and secure state of being, such as what occurs with trauma.

to the healing process, we must realize that the Church, as the body of Christ, must not only continually point to that relationship, but also *be* that relationship in many practical ways, i.e., "being the hands and feet"—but also reflecting the heart—of Jesus.

Safety. As mentioned in regard to our sense of neuroception, our nervous system is constantly scanning for signs of safety or threat in any and all situations. Therefore, having a sense of safety, in general, is crucial, and is thus Herman's (2015) first stage and essential task for recovery: "This task takes precedence over all others, for no other therapeutic work can possibly succeed if safety has not been adequately secured. No other therapeutic work should even be attempted until a reasonable degree of safety has been achieved" (pp. 159-160). American psychiatrist and neuroscientist Stephen Porges goes even further to state that "safety *is* the treatment" (Badenoch, 2018, p. ix). But cultivating a sense of safety is multifaceted in that it must occur internally (within one's self), environmentally, and relationally, and "always includes a component of social support" (Herman, 2015, p. 160). Therefore, the Church must be a safe place and composed of safe people to engender a sense of safety in others, which will facilitate reconnection with others and God. To note, environmentally, for some a church building may be considered an unsafe place for various reasons. With that, the "church"—which is the people—must go to meet with others in their preferred safe spaces and not necessarily expect (or request) attendance at a church service. But for many others, a church is deemed a safe place and to where they will go for refuge and literal sanctuary. However, a church that transforms is not contained within a building, it is contained within the people participating in safe, loving, and healing relationships with one another and in Christ, wherever that may be.

Remembrance and Mourning. Herman's (2015) second stage of recovery occurs when people can safely recall and tell the stories of their trauma, which is deeply personal, vulnerable,

and potentially retraumatizing, and the reason why safety is a necessity and must be established first. I do not believe it is the Church's place nor responsibility to be a person's trauma therapist, and people should be referred to professionals accordingly. However, people must have social support and be provided the safe space and opportunity to share their (appropriate) stories with safe and trusted people within the Church to facilitate the healing process. In this way the Church is a vital adjunct to the professional help and treatment people may be receiving. Furthermore, it keeps people connected to the body of Christ, and thus to God, which further facilitates the development of secure attachment to God. All that being said, many people will not need professional help, and having the space and safety to share their stories and have them be heard by an empathetic other goes a very long way to help them heal and be restored; in fact, being an empathetic witness is the essential element of the therapeutic relationship within psychotherapy and other forms of counseling (Allen, 2013; Badenoch, 2018), and there is no reason the Church cannot be and do the same.

Trauma always incurs (and often results from) some form of loss, and in the retelling of their stories people must mourn—and be encouraged to mourn—those losses. Jesus's words are salient here: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (*NRSVue*, 2022, Matthew 5:4), as well as Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:15 to "mourn with those who mourn" or "weep with those who weep." Thus, it is the responsibility of the Church to mourn life losses with people, which can range from death of a significant other, to not having received the love and support they needed as a child, to losing jobs, homes, or friendships. Jesus is our compassionate (i.e., co-suffering) savior, and as his representative body on earth, so must we be as the Church. Mains (1997) uses the image of Michelangelo's *Pietà* as a symbol of what the Church can be for those hurting and/or traumatized, i.e., that of being the one to receive and hold

the broken, the dying, and those near death, literally or figuratively.[159] Mains' (1997) remarks that follow illustrate the healing power of being a *pietà* for others:

> Undoubtedly, there are dark moments so desperate that we need someone to come alongside us: to get up into the deathbed, as it were, if only figuratively; to hold us tightly, to rock us gently, to protect and cover us so that we feel safe enough to let the grief and anguish rise. These strong ones hold us, often silently, so we will not be blasted apart by the terror that is shattering our identities. These wise ones understand that they hold us not to keep us (to possess or control us), *but to give us strength. But they do more than just hold us; many, knowing mercy in its sublimest sense, lift us up to God, lift our pain and sorrow, our emotion-shredding dismay, in ways we are incapable of doing for ourselves* [emphasis added]. (pp. 27-28)

Reconnection. Herman (2015) opens her chapter on the third (and final) stage of recovery with the following: "Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self" (p. 196). While likely unintended by Herman, Christians will hear allusions to putting off the "old self" that has been crucified with Christ and no longer lives (see Ephesians 4:22; Galatians 2:20, and Romans 6:6), and putting on the "new self" created and being renewed in the knowledge and likeness of God (see Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10). While those sentiments are repeatedly exhorted from pulpits, those in the pews (and perhaps also the pulpits) may wonder just how to do that, which renders it ideological and not something realistically attainable. However, that is likely because the method of doing such has not been well-known, understood, or presented to people, and that method is through principally engaging

[159] To view an image of Michelangelo's *Pietà,* go to: http://www.italianrenaissance.org/michelangelos-pieta/

in relationship with God and one another to attain secure attachment that will bring forth the "new self." Indeed, our old self is the insecure and traumatized self, having experienced millennia of traumatic retention, but instead of it being "put off"—as if it could be discarded—it must be transformed through the relational healing process spoken of herein. Notably, this is where correct knowledge plays a vital role, as the Church, in teaching the commands and following the example of Jesus, provides the guiding information of what it looks like to embody Jesus, but then also provides the relational scaffolding for people to develop unto Jesus and embody him within themselves. As stated earlier, Jesus is our developmental *telos*, the end goal of who we are to become, and that development can only occur in relationship with like-minded people and also God, in Christ, and through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Trauma and, especially, shame, drives disconnection from self, others, and often God, and healing and restoration occurs through reconnection to self, others, and God. As attachment research has affirmed, reconnecting in a secure relationship develops a new and coherent sense of self that comes to replace the old self that was disconnected, confused, and/or fragmented from trauma or insecure attachments. In a new, secure attachment, we reform our old and dysfunctional internal working models into new secure mental models from which we begin to operate, i.e., operate like Jesus. When our secure attachment is to God, he becomes our internal working model who informs us of who we truly are—and always have been in Christ—and provides the relational grace and power through the Holy Spirit (the ultimate internal working model) to then fully become that new self. As it pertains to sin, the new self does not operate with such behaviors or motivations, and sin thereby abates while love for others begins to reign in its place.[160]

[160] Notably, loving others must include love of enemy (see Matthew 5:43-48). Wilder (2020) notes: "Dallas [Willard]'s main test for Christlike character [is] whether one spontaneously responds to one's enemies with love"

Commonality. As was demonstrated in our reading of Genesis 3, "[t]raumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individuals and communities" (Herman, 2015, p. 214). Herman (2015) continues:

> Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.
>
> Repeatedly in the testimony of survivors there comes a moment when a sense of connection is restored by another person's unaffected display of generosity. Something in herself that the victim believes to be irretrievably destroyed—faith, decency, courage—is reawakened by an example of common altruism. *Mirrored in the actions of others, the survivor recognizes and reclaims a lost part of herself* [emphasis added]. At that moment, the survivor begins to rejoin the human commonality. . . .
>
> The restoration of social bonds begins with the discovery that one is not alone. Nowhere is this experience more immediate, powerful, or convincing than in a group. (Herman, 2015, pp. 214-215)

As was presented in Chapters 3 and 4, the essence of a traumatic experience is that of being alone (physically and/or psychologically) and unsupported; therefore, part of the resolution and healing of that trauma is to be emotionally and psychologically connected to and supported by others, and specifically others who demonstrate contingent communication. This element of

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(p. 3). Love of enemies then helps to stop retributive and sinful cycles of violence and systems of oppression and prejudice.

commonality is one at which the Church should excel in being a community of unconditional love, mercy, and grace, where people can be "naked and unashamed" alongside others with similar life experiences and/or the ability to empathize, and who have found some measure of healing and restoration in Christ and with others. Notably, church small groups and studies can play an analogous role to psychotherapy support groups, and within those groups—when properly led—people can experience the same healing through the power of group dynamics that survivors in psychotherapy groups experience (Herman, 2015).

Being Born Again

Nicodemus was quite confused when Jesus told him he must be "born again" to see the kingdom of God (see John 3:1-10), and for many people since it has remained a somewhat confusing statement, evidenced in part by skipping past it and highlighting John 3:16 as the crux of the entire discourse between the two. While being "born again" is preached often, it does not have a relevant context and the explanatory power for it to truly be understood and, thereby, transformative. John 3:16 is easier to grasp, especially within the context of sin as debt and crime, where "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*NRSVue*, 2022) as a sacrifice to satisfy its payment and punishment. But in the context of sin as a relational breach that must be repaired, being born again into a new relationship with God is the means of repairing that breach, while repairing and restoring us in the process.

In choosing to follow Jesus, and in believing Jesus is Messiah, we follow him "home" into the kingdom of God through a process of being rebirthed, and by which we are saved. We are reborn through the Spirit into a relationship with God, our Father, who then *re-parents* us and by which our old self is healed and made new and progressively develops into the likeness of Jesus, our developmental *telos*, who is the exact representation of God (see John 14:9;

Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:13). God is our consistently available, sensitively attuned, stronger and wiser attachment figure who gives us "a strong and pervasive feeling of security" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 27) that we carry with us as an internal working model (evidenced by the Holy Spirit), even in the midst of adversity. Furthermore, God is our safe haven and secure base, in whom we come to know that we are worthy to be loved and accepted for who we are, that our needs matter and will be met (by him or others), and that we are indeed delighted in, always have been, and will always be welcomed home where we will be seen, soothed, and safe, and be made to flourish.

Attaining secure attachment to anyone, including God, is a process, one that can take a couple of years or more (Allen, 2013). But for those who do the work of making sense of their past (which effectively renews the mind, per Romans 12:2), and engage in a healing and transformative process that includes healthy, reciprocating, and restorative relationships (King, 2016), they will earn and walk in security within themselves, with others, and also with God. Furthermore, they will pass that security along intergenerationally and transgenerationally in the form of secure attachment behavior, thus helping to bring healing to others individually and collectively, which then brings about transformation at systemic levels, and thereby facilitates the restoration—and flourishing—of all things.

Concluding and Closing the Dissertation

We have taken a long, yet necessary journey to establish that the doctrine of original sin, and specifically its central concept of original sin, i.e., that humans possess an inherited and inherent sinful nature, is not the only plausible or biblically based explanation for understanding why humans sin. However, I will go further to say I believe the concept of original sin is no longer tenable given our current and advancing knowledge and understanding of trauma,

attachment, and biblical hermeneutics, and to continue to maintain or insist that humans have an inherently sinful nature is not only unnecessary, but also potentially harmful in what it can perpetuate (e.g., insecure sense of self, attachment trauma, and sin itself), but also by what it can prevent, namely, individual and collective healing and restoration from trauma, insecure attachment, and their transgenerational effects. Therefore, I propose the doctrine of original sin be reformulated to remove the concept of original sin and replace it with the concept of original trauma, and specifically a trauma that was unmitigated and unresolved, and thus resulted in trauma-related physiological and neuropsychological changes that became internalized and thus manifested in normal posttraumatic behaviors, with many of them sinful as we understand sin. That unresolved past trauma was passed on transgenerationally and has carried on for millennia as traumatic retention that has long since lost its context, and has since been interpreted as humanity possessing an inherently sinful nature, but as the argument herein has shown, that is not the case. An efficient cause of sin we see within ourselves and the world can be traced back to an original trauma that has been invariably compounded by our own traumas and insecure attachments, yet all of which can still be healed, and humanity restored to reflect its original goodness and the image of God.

To relate to and embody Christ, individually and collectively and for the sake of the world, we must heal and resolve the trauma that embodies us. As trauma resolves through establishing secure attachments to God and others, more opportunity is created for the Holy Spirit to dwell and transform as people are no longer enslaved to unconscious triggers from past traumatic retention, and can instead receive, rest in, and operate from the love and grace of God, in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. Such healing and empowerment elicit newfound levels of empathy, compassion, connection, creativity, and resiliency (Dana, 2018) that allows for loving

God and loving others well (to include our enemies) even in the midst of hostility and adversity. But we cannot heal what is not revealed, and we must bind the strong man before we can take over his house. Therefore, becoming aware of present and past trauma (often unconscious and developmental) is essential to healing and transformation; however, there is observable resistance to acknowledging the presence and effects of trauma among many Western Christians, which is a significant barrier that needs to be removed. Hopefully reframing the narrative from original sin to an original trauma is sufficient to encourage believers to acknowledge, accept, and help each other heal and transform.

Finally, the Church must become a safe place and a place of healing, which was a central element of Jesus's ministry on earth and one the Church must restore within itself. The Church will evidence that by facilitating and reflecting secure attachment to God, and by placing Jesus as our developmental *telos* at the center of its theology and ministry. We must become people who believe in and develop safe, empathetic, and non-judgmental relationships with others, which are crucial for revealing and healing trauma, as well as being a co-suffering *pietà* to facilitate mourning and processing loss. We must become the body of Christ that looks more and more like Jesus, and points to a relationship with God the Father as the source of all healing and life. In sum, we must become like Jesus, who in the midst of great hostility, adversity, and trauma, continued to love all people by maintaining a secure attachment to God even unto and through the cross, where he overcame death (the effect of sin), and brought about salvation for all who would come to share in that same attachment to God in and through him. What was wrought and undone *in* Adam, was reconciled, repaired, redeemed, and restored *in* Jesus. Come home to Jesus.

For Further Study

Integrating the concepts and studies of the doctrine of sin, trauma, and attachment theory allows for multiple new avenues of discussion to emerge. This dissertation added to the ongoing conversations that surround each of these areas of study individually, but in the process of integrating them new opportunities emerge for further study and discussion. Multiple thoughts came to mind as I wrote this dissertation, and the following are a few examples for consideration.

Given that theology emerges in part from personal contexts, it would be interesting to apply a trauma hermeneutic to the lives of Augustine, Luther, or Calvin in the same manner as Marie Hoffman did with John Nelson Darby in her text, *When the Roll is called: Trauma and the Soul of American Evangelicalism*, to ascertain the potentially traumatic events in their lives that informed their views on sin and humans possessing an inherently sinful nature.

In considering personal contexts, there appears to be a psychological draw to Calvinism that keeps it alive and well in Western Christianity, which I believe is also rooted in trauma. Here one could consider and analyze Collin Hansen's (2006, 2008) work (or others') to find those connections between trauma and Reformed theology by asking, for example, are there patterns of insecure attachment seen in adherents of Reformed theology, and what in Reformed theology appeals to those internal working models that perpetuates that theology transgenerationally?

One could also do qualitative research using the AAI to assess the state of mind regarding attachment in adherents of Reformed theology as compared to adherents of other streams of Christianity, e.g., Eastern Orthodoxy. Is there a significant difference to be noted in attachment patterns, and if so, why might that be the case? Do their underlying beliefs and theology play a role in attachment behaviors?

Reception history also significantly influences theology over time, and doing an in-depth study of the reception of the doctrine of original sin can serve, for example, to reveal how traumatic contexts continued to form and fashion the theological underpinnings of the doctrine as it appears to have become increasingly pessimistic by the time of the Reformation. I would attribute that to the rather traumatic medieval culture and climate, but further study needs to be done to confirm such thinking.

Matthew Croasmun's work in *The Emergence of Sin: The Cosmic Tyrant in Romans*, is intriguing in the connections that can be made between trauma, its contagiousness, and the supervenience of sin utilizing emergent theory.

Finally, from a neuroscientific perspective, one can do a deeper study of the neurophysiology of trauma, the internalization and embodiment of trauma, and how it generates the posttraumatic responses that appear as "sinful" behavior, which would further substantiate the conclusions of the thesis herein.

Lastly, while this is principally a theological dissertation, I believe it allows for those working in the field of psychology to perhaps better understand the impact of their clients' religion and spirituality, and how it can both positively or negatively influence their mental, spiritual, and physical health. Furthermore, this dissertation hopefully allows and encourages those in the field of theology (to include clergy) to broaden their perspective and incorporate other disciplines into their theology and ministries to develop a more holistic approach to their respective religions and spirituality, while still being integrous to their core values and beliefs.

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Appendix: DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (APA, 2013)

Diagnostic Criteria

309.81 (F43.10)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

- **Note:** The following criteria apply to adults, adolescents, and children older than 6 years. For children 6 years and younger, see corresponding criteria below.

A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:
    1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
    2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
    3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend. In cases of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental.
    4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting human remains; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse).
        - **Note:** Criterion A4 does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related.

B. Presence of one (or more) of the following intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred:
    1. Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s).
        - **Note:** In children older than 6 years, repetitive play may occur in which

themes or aspects of the traumatic event(s) are expressed.

2. Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s).
    - **Note:** In children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.
3. Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring. (Such reactions may occur on a continuum, with the most extreme expression being a complete loss of awareness of present surroundings.)
    - **Note:** In children, trauma-specific reenactment may occur in play.
4. Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).
5. Marked physiological reactions to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).

B. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by one or both of the following:
    1. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).
    2. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).

B. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by two (or

more) of the following:

1. Inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s) (typically due to dissociative amnesia and not to other factors such as head injury, alcohol, or drugs).
2. Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world (e.g., "I am bad," "No one can be trusted," "The world is completely dangerous," "My whole nervous system is permanently ruined").
3. Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others.
4. Persistent negative emotional state (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame).
5. Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities.
6. Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
7. Persistent inability to experience positive emotions (e.g., inability to experience happiness, satisfaction, or loving feelings).

B. Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by two (or more) of the following:

1. Irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression toward people or objects.
2. Reckless or self-destructive behavior.
3. Hypervigilance.
4. Exaggerated startle response.
5. Problems with concentration.

6. Sleep disturbance (e.g., difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep).

B. Duration of the disturbance (Criteria B, C, D, and E) is more than 1 month.

C. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

D. The disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., medication, alcohol) or another medical condition.

Specify whether:

- **With dissociative symptoms:** The individual's symptoms meet the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, and in addition, in response to the stressor, the individual experiences persistent or recurrent symptoms of either of the following:
    1. **Depersonalization:** Persistent or recurrent experiences of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body (e.g., feeling as though one were in a dream; feeling a sense of unreality of self or body or of time moving slowly).
    2. **Derealization:** Persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings (e.g., the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant, or distorted).

    1. **Note:** To use this subtype, the dissociative symptoms must not be attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., blackouts, behavior during alcohol intoxication) or another medical condition (e.g., complex partial seizures).

Specify if:

- **With delayed expression:** If the full diagnostic criteria are not met until at least 6 months after the event (although the onset and expression of some symptoms may be

immediate).

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder for Children 6 Years and Younger

A. In children 6 years and younger, exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:
    1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
    2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others, especially primary caregivers.
        - **Note:** Witnessing does not include events that are witnessed only in electronic media, television, movies, or pictures.
    3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a parent or caregiving figure.
B. Presence of one (or more) of the following intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred:
    1. Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s).
        - **Note:** Spontaneous and intrusive memories may not necessarily appear distressing and may be expressed as play reenactment.
    2. Recurrent distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s).
        - **Note:** It may not be possible to ascertain that the frightening content is related to the traumatic event.
    3. Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the child feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring. (Such reactions may occur on a continuum, with the most extreme expression being a complete loss of awareness of present

surroundings.) Such trauma-specific reenactment may occur in play.

4. Intense or prolonged psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).
5. Marked physiological reactions to reminders of the traumatic event(s).

3. One (or more) of the following symptoms, representing either persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s) or negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event(s), must be present, beginning after the event(s) or worsening after the event(s):

- Persistent Avoidance of Stimuli

3.

1. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid activities, places, or physical reminders that arouse recollections of the traumatic event(s).
2. Avoidance of or efforts to avoid people, conversations, or interpersonal situations that arouse recollections of the traumatic event(s).

1. Negative Alterations in Cognitions

3. Substantially increased frequency of negative emotional states (e.g., fear, guilt, sadness, shame, confusion).
4. Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities, including constriction of play.
5. Socially withdrawn behavior.
6. Persistent reduction in expression of positive emotions.

4. Alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning or worsening after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by two (or more) of the

following:

1. Irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation) typically expressed as verbal or physical aggression toward people or objects (including extreme temper tantrums).
2. Hypervigilance.
3. Exaggerated startle response.
4. Problems with concentration.
5. Sleep disturbance (e.g., difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep).

5. The duration of the disturbance is more than 1 month.
6. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in relationships with parents, siblings, peers, or other caregivers or with school behavior.
7. The disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., medication or alcohol) or another medical condition.

Specify whether:

- **With dissociative symptoms:** The individual's symptoms meet the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, and the individual experiences persistent or recurrent symptoms of either of the following:
    1. **Depersonalization:** Persistent or recurrent experiences of feeling detached from, and as if one were an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body (e.g., feeling as though one were in a dream; feeling a sense of unreality of self or body or of time moving slowly).
    2. **Derealization:** Persistent or recurrent experiences of unreality of surroundings (e.g., the world around the individual is experienced as unreal, dreamlike, distant,

or distorted).

1. **Note:** To use this subtype, the dissociative symptoms must not be attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., blackouts) or another medical condition (e.g., complex partial seizures).

Specify if:

- **With delayed expression:** If the full diagnostic criteria are not met until at least 6 months after the event (although the onset and expression of some symptoms may be immediate).